

## Interview H0203: Taring, Jigme Sumten Wangpo Namgyal ['phreng ring, 'jig med sum rten dbang po rnam rgyal], (India, 1992) : Part No. 1 of 2

*Jigme Taring was eldest son of the half-brother of the Maharaja of Sikkim and an important aristocratic official in the Tibetan government. He describes his life and how his father migrated from Sikkim to Tibet and was given manorial estates by the Tibetan government and how he then became a lay official. He discusses in detail about his English education in Darjeeling and how he was told by the Tibetan Government to work as the interpreter for 25 soldiers who went to get training in the use of machine guns (in 1933) and how he later became the depön of Drongdrag Regiment and how the regiment came to get disbanded. Taring talks about early vehicular traffic and how English schools were closed down due to the abbots of Sendregasum. Taring explains in detail about receiving the order to shell Sera Monastery during the Sera war of 1947, and how he worked on the construction of the Trisam Bridge for 6 years and how he became one of the heads of the Laja Office where he then worked for 18 years. He describes in detail the responsibilities of the Laja Office.*

Q

We are here today on the 5th of July at Rajpur at the house of Mr. Taring Dzasa who was the former Education [Kalön](#) of the Tibetan Education Council in India. We discussed in a group for the last few days regarding the Tibetan affairs in general from 1933 to 1951 (see Interview series H.202). Now today, I would like to talk to you alone about your life because you are unlike any other Tibetan officials. Not only are you a member of a noble family, but you have migrated from Sikkim to Tibet and joined the Tibetan Government service. You are also one of the first Tibetan Government officials who had been to a Western school. So we consider you as one of the important figures in the Tibetan

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government service. We would like to know first how did you come to Tibet and how did you join the Tibetan government service? Then you spent most of your time in the [Laja](#) office, which was one of the most important of the large supply offices. You were the Head of the [Laja](#) Office for 18 years. This is also unique because many officers got transferred into other departments quickly. So I want you to speak here about how you became a government officer. What happened during that period? How did you come to migrate from Sikkim to Tibet? And how could you hold the position of [Laja](#) for 18 years. Also what were the most important activities of this Department, etc.? Please speak about these things.

A

I would like to start with how the Taring family migrated from Sikkim to Tibet. My late father was the son of the eldest son of the Sikkim Raja Thutop Namgyal [tib. mthu stobs rnam rgyal]. The late Sikyong [tib. srid skyong] Trülku and my father were brothers from the same parents. They also had two sisters. One of the sisters was sent to Sakya [tib. sa skya] [as a bride] and the other died from smallpox in Taring. During the British rule in India, we used to change summer and winter residences [tib. dbyar sa dgun sa] between Sikkim and [Yadong](#). In [Yadong](#), there was a palace called Chumbi [tib. [chu](#) 'bi] Palace and we stayed there in the summer. We had about 10 servants there and it was a separate set up. So when the British invaded into Sikkim, the then Raja left Sikkim and shifted to this palace. At that time, the Tibet Government looked after the Sikkim Raja families very well and took care of the borders like the Lungtrug La mountain pass, etc. They presented them with many things like a statue of the Buddha made from Dzikhyim, that was about one foot and one hand in size, and a written Kangyur manuscript, each volume of which was barely able to be carried by one person. They were all in [Yadong](#). Most of the religious objects at the palace in [Yadong](#) had been presented by the Tibetan Government. While my grandparents were travelling to Tibet, they got lost and arrived in a place called Tsomodrak [tib. gtso mo brag?]. My father was born there that night, so he was given the name Tsodrak Namgyal. [tib. gtso brag rnam rgyal]

The other brother, Sikyong Trülku, visited England, Japan, Europe, China, and was very active and well educated. When I was about 5 or 6, he visited Tibet and went to Gyantse and asked my father to return to Sikkim and take over the throne. My father, however, declined the offer saying that he had come to Tibet and settled there. So he probably had already set up in Tibet. When we say 'set up in Tibet,' it means that an estate had already been given. I think the Taring estate had already been given to us at that time. Maybe not.

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Anyway, he was already set up whether he owned the place or not. The reason why they were given the Taring Estate is that during the trouble in the border area, they worked hard in favor of the Tibetan Government. Consequently, the Government stated that you have not changed your loyalty towards Buddhism in the wrong direction [tib. bstan pa dang sgo phyogs ma log pa] and so as a token of our appreciation, we offer you the Taring Estate. Before giving the Taring Estate to us, the Tibet Government used to give us about 1000 [khe](#) of salt and about 2000 [khe](#) of barley. So later the government decided that in lieu of those above mentioned reasons, they gave us two estates to serve as the basis of our subsistence.

Q

Did you consider this as a [thabden](#) [tib. thab rten] (a salary estate)?

A

No, it was not for a [thabden](#), but rather as a 'basis for livelihood' estate (tib. tshoden ['tsho rten]). The British had already taken over Sikkim. My father along with the father of Lhatsün [tib. lha btsun] escaped into Tibet.

Q

Which Lhatsün was this?

A

Lingbu [tib. gling bu] Lhatsün Rinpoche was my paternal uncle. After reaching Tibet, the Tibet government gave us the choice of 2 estates and they chose the Taring Estate. The Taring estate was a very small estate which used to be an estate given to a [depön](#) [tib. mda' gzhis]. It had only 6 1/2 don. So whatever they chose became Taring. My father was quite young at that time and he used to go from the Taring estate to [Yadong](#) and back. In those days he used to stay overnight at the estate of Dode. My mother to be was the daughter of Dode [tib. mdo sde]. Father built up acquaintance with Dode's daughter and later took her as his bride. There was no talk of becoming a Tibetan Government official at all. Therefore, we called the estate a tshoden rather than a [thabden](#).

About that time when the government gave the estate, his younger brother, Sikyong Trülku, paid a visit and insisted that my father return to Sikkim to be the Ruler of Sikkim. He said, "You are the most senior brother and it is your legitimate right to be the Ruler

of Sikkim so you must return. However, my father declined the offer saying that he had no knowledge about the functioning of the modern government of Sikkim which required a lot of dealings with the British and so on and so forth, and what is more, now I have chosen Tibet as my headquarters and I shall remain here. I have no hesitation passing on the throne to you, so you must return to Sikkim and take over as the King of Sikkim. That is how my father abdicated his throne to his younger brother. Sikyong Trülku, however, insisted that my father should take the name, while all the responsibilities would be carried out by his younger brother, himself. Even then, my father flatly refused because he had the estate in Tibet.

The Chinese invaded Tibet during the 13th Dalai Lama's period. The 13th Dalai Lama escaped into India and on his way back from India to Tibet, my father visited him at the Samding [tib. bsam lding] estate. The Dalai Lama told him to become a Tibetan Government official, however he managed to make an excuse. According to my memory, when I began going to school he had not become a government official. Later, however, he paid a visit to Lhasa for pilgrimage. I am not very sure which year it was. It may have been the Snake Year. Anyway, he went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa during the New Year and Mönlam [tib. smon lam] Prayer Festival. He stayed at the [Ragashag](#) family's house. At that time, the Dalai Lama sent a message through the [drönyerchemmo](#) Data [tib. zla rta] saying that my father should seek the status of a government official. In another words, he should join the government official's rank. However, he didn't have to stay in Lhasa during the initial period. My feeling is that the Government wanted to have some kind of official status to be given to the Sikkim ruler for political purposes. Moreover, since the government of Tibet had already given him an estate and the Dalai Lama had already told him once before at Samding that he should take the rank of government official, it became very difficult for my father to excuse himself again. He had to join the government and was given the rank of 'Rimshi' (4th level). He immediately had to go through the ceremony of a "New Appointment Audience" [before the Dalai Lama]. The official announcement also said that he, Taring, being from the Sikkimese royal family, need not to stay in Lhasa permanently. However, every year during the Losar and Mönlam Festival he should visit Lhasa and while in Lhasa should attend all the government's ceremonial functions.

I do not think my father had any choice. He just had to accept whatever orders the Dalai Lama passed on. After sometime, I finished my schooling at St Paul's in Darjeeling, so I returned to Tibet and stayed on the Taring estate. About that time, I received a telegram from Lhasa that said that in accordance with the wishes and order of the Dalai Lama, we

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are dispatching 25 soldiers from Lhasa led by son of Yuthok. You should join them as interpreter and also take the training.

That very day, I also received a telegram from Mr. Williamson who was the Political Officer [of the British Government] in Sikkim. He said Sikkim was under the jurisdiction of the Crown of England and you being the son of the Sikkim Ruler, you should come down to India for work. In that he mentioned that I should come down to Simla on a certain date and he also said that from Simla they were going to visit certain areas in [Tö](#) and I should join them for this trip. As far as my food and other expenses were concerned, it would be given by the Mess of the Political Officer and I would be given a handsome remuneration. If I had joined, the Government of British would have given me a rank of Dzasa Rai Bahadur. So, anyway, I received both the telegrams together - one from India and another from Lhasa. So, now what to do? Basically speaking, with the background of my education and as it was easy work, I should have gone to join the British Government service. However, my late father had showed us a path. So, I thought it was better to stick to his decision so I declined the offer of the British Government. My telegram from the Tibetan Government was issued by the [Trapchi](#) Office. At that time, Yuthok was the [kandrön](#). It was the year of Water-Monkey. At that time there was trouble in Kham.

Q

What trouble was there in Kham?

A

During the Water-Monkey year, there was fighting between the Chinese, what we called [Tögya](#) [tib. stod rgya] (Upper Chinese). Probably, it was during the tenure of Doji Trenthong [tib. mdo spyi bkras mthong] at Chamdo. They [the troops] arrived in Gyantse. The arrangement was made in Gyantse at Tsoduk's house. My wife and I met there at Janglo [tib. lcang lo]. They even had a salary document for me. My annual salary was 12 [dotse](#). Now let us see what the value of that was. 12 Dotse was equal to 600 [sang](#) and one Indian rupee was equal to 5 [sang](#). So it amounted to something like over Rs.100/- per year. Anyway, that is beside the point. Then I carried out my training with them for about 6 to 7 months. Then I went to Lhasa. That was the time, as I mentioned to you earlier, that machine guns first appeared in Tibet. It seems that they had had Lewis guns and sten guns. The late Dalai Lama was very fond of guns, especially machine guns. As I told you yesterday, when we were leaving from Gyantse to Lhasa, we packed up all our

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equipment that we were given from India. However, at Chushul, we received a personal communication and in accordance with that order we had to march from Shündongkar [tib. shun gdong dkar] onwards. So we departed from Chushul and stayed at Nyethang [tib. mnyes thang] for a night. Our destination was not very far from Nyethang. We reached there before noon and opened all the boxes there and assembled all our equipment. Even the saddles, etc. And we got ready.

The next day we reached [Gyetse luding](#) and there we had to wait until it became the perfect time. I believe the late Dalai Lama was very particular about the timing of things, etc. He had to perform everything on time in accordance with the astrological charts. So we went up to Gyetse Luding on horse and thereafter we had to walk up to the Jensel Phodrang [tib. spyang bsal pho brang] [in Norbulinga]. That day I was wearing very tight leather breeches and I could hardly walk. But I had no excuse. I had to march on. When we reached near Gyatso, we saw that the Dalai Lama himself was near the Northern Gate of [Norbulinga](#). He was watching from there. From a distance, we could see that the Dalai Lama was there because of his bright yellow dress. When we reached there he had already gone inside. When we entered the Northern Gate of [Norbulinga](#), I saw one young man who was wearing a brown dress made of shema [tib. shas ma] (the best woolen cloth) and a [hat](#) known as Wanglhamo. It also had hanging stripes made of silver and gold thread and a coral-crest. He seemed very intelligent. His dress gave the feeling of an ordinary person [rather than a government official], so I thought that he must be the famous Kujar [Künphel](#). So I saluted and others also followed. He told me to go through the east side and enter the inner gate of the palace from the main gate. So accordingly I marched around the palace and entered from the main gate. The Dalai Lama had already reached the main gate and was looking through the large glass windows on the first floor of the palace.

Q

Was he looking in a happy manner or was he looking in a serious manner?

A

I don't remember well about this because I was a student who had just entered a new world.

Q

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How old were you then?

A

I was about 21-22-23. Up to then I had stayed in the village and mostly I went to India. Almost half of my life was spent in the village and in India. Every year I went to Kalimpong. I was studying at the St. Paul's school in Darjeeling and I had reached the Intermediate Level. Then we entered from the main gate of the Jensei Palace and we saluted and placed the guns facing towards the main gate. At this point, the Dalai Lama came down along with Kujar. He examined our guns and looked very happy and asked questions and appeared very happy. Then he went back and Kujar told us that we could retire to the Gusung (Bodyguard) Regiment where he had made all the arrangements. So accordingly, we proceeded to the Gusung Regiment but found no arrangements ready for us so [were told] we should stay in Lhasa at our own houses. However, we had to leave our ammunitions, horses, and saddles. We left them there. The [depön](#) of the Gusung Regiment was Jangra [tib. lcang ra] who later took over as [magji](#). He told us now you might be very tired since you have walked far from a distant place. This was difficult and when you are wearing breeches on your legs, it was especially uncomfortable so now you may remove them and relax completely. This made me very happy. I removed my breeches and sat with crossed legs, relaxed as there were no chairs. It was very difficult as my legs were numb.

In [Norbulinga](#) you cannot smoke cigarettes so the [depön](#) of the Gusung Regiment told me that since we cannot smoke cigarettes here, I have been smoking biris, so you can go ahead and help yourself. The biri I smoked that day, you have no idea how good it was. So after that we were served food and we relaxed completely and by the late evening we went back to our own places in Lhasa.

Q

Since it was your first visit to Lhasa, where did you stay?

A

This was not my first visit to Lhasa. I stayed at Tsarong House.

Q

How did you get married?

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A

We got married in Gyantse. We came to know each other while in India and had exchanged letters. Even before that, I had visited Lhasa and stayed at the [Ragashag](#) House with my sister. My wife was, of course, then in Tsarong House. It was during one of the Mönlam Festivals that we wrote each other a letter and finally made the decision. We asked for the hands of two daughters of Tsarong family, that is my wife Rinchen Drolma [tib. rin chen sgrol ma] and her younger sister Jangchub Drolma [tib. byang 'chub sgrol ma] for me and my younger brother Chime Dorje [tib. 'chi med rdo rje]. My father had made the engagement ritual [tib. slong chang], the tradition of giving some gifts when asking for the hand of the bride. So both my wife and her sister came as brides together to Lhasa.

Q

So one stayed at Taring and the other at Dobtra [tib. rdo bkra]?

A

Dobtra was conferred to Sikkim during the 5th Dalai Lama's time as a salary estate to Nyertsang Thabden [tib. gnyer tshang thab rten]. There was a land tenure document [tib. bka' gtan] conferred during the Great 5th Dalai Lama's reign that was written on brocade cloth. When we (Tarings) were in [Yadong](#), Dobtra had been very helpful to us and we merged and stayed together at Taring. My younger brother Dobtra was staying with us. So my father asked for the hands of Tsarong's two daughters and we all were married in Gyantse. About a year after our marriage, me and my wife Rinchen Drolma went to Kolcutta on a late honeymoon trip. My brother Dobtra and his wife Jangchub stayed at our estate. She was not well and when we returned back from Kolcutta, she had died. She died quite young. Then after passing a few years staying on the estate, there wasn't much to do except take charge of Tsarong's correspondences in English. While my wife Rinchen Drolma was at Tsarong, she used to handle all the correspondence and now since she had come to Taring, all the Tsarong correspondence was redirected to Taring House. Rinchen Dolma translated them and prepared replies to them and then sent them back again to get Tsarong's signature. Those were the days when time moved slowly. Then came the time to take a second bride for Dobtra. Tsarong had returned from India and was working in the [Trapchi](#) Office. I was given the suggestion that I should share my wife, Rinchen Drolma with Dobtra. Although polyandry is prevalent in our society, since I had

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some Western education and had known these people, I could not accommodate this idea in my mind. Then Rinchen Drolma suggested the name of Delerapten's [tib. bde legs bar brtan] daughter, Dekyongla [tib. bde skyong lags] as brother Dobtra's bride. She said that it would be nice since Dekyongla [tib. bde skyong lags] is her sister's daughter. This was finally accepted and Dekyongla was taken as the bride of Dobtra.

I came to Lhasa after the completion of the machine-gun training and during the Gyetor [tib. brgyad gtor] Festival of Water-Bird year, I was formally commissioned as a government official. With my appointment, we had requested that my father should be granted his resignation [from service]. Since we had no [second] estate that was conferred by the government, it was necessary for my father to resign. Kujar said that this will be done. He further said that I should take the rank of a [rimshi](#), which was the rank held by my father. Kujar was a very decisive person. He told me that I need not go to other people and spend unnecessarily [to get a good rank]. I told him that I would not take the rank of a [rimshi](#) since I am quite young and without any experience. However, I told him that as I belonged to the royal family of Sikkim, I would only seek the rank of a Senampa. So in this way I was commissioned in the Water-Bird year simultaneously with the payroll officer, Phala Kungö Phogpön [tib. phogs dpon].

My father was granted his resignation and he stayed on our estate doing religious prayers. My wife and I stayed in Lhasa at Tsarong House as tenants. Dobtra Chime Dorje went with our parents to our estate to help them. By that time, I had two daughters and one of them was already attending English school. Then it was felt that we, the three brothers, should live separately and this should be decided while our late father was still living. This decision was agreed by all. We made documents to be kept by all three of us. Betty who is my wife's daughter, was married to George and the Taring estate was given to brother Dobtra. My wife and I said that we do not want anything from the family's property except for the house in Lhasa which we built. We told Dobtra and Rinzin Namgyal [tib. rig 'dzin rnam rgyal] to divide among themselves whatever property was in Taring house. As for me and my wife, we asked for just the house in Lhasa and the few items of furniture that were there. We suggested to Rinzin Namgyal and Dobtra that one of them should stay and take over the Taring estate and the other should take over the Dobtra estate.

With the demise of Sikyong Trülku, my father acquired one third of the property of the deceased. The property was divided among the three relatives, the present Chögyal, Tashi Namgyal [tib. chos rgyal bkra shis rnam rgyal], my late father, Sikyong Trülku, and two

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daughters from the same father, Thutob Namgyal. While Chögyal's mother was Lhading [tib. lha lding], the mother of four was from Shigatse Peding [tib. dpal lding]. In this way, since my father belonged to the royal family of Sikkim, the late Sikyong Trülku's belongings were divided into three equal parts. My father's share was brought to our Taring house and included very expensive and high quality possessions, as the late Sikyong Trülku had traveled to many countries in Europe and in China and Japan.

My father offered quite a large part of his share to the Dalai Lama when he went to have an audience for his appointment in the government service. Before this, he had also offered some to the Panchen Lama. So, whatever remaining property was left with my late father, was divided between Dobtra Chime Dorje and Rinzin Namgyal. I further gave the suggestion that since my brother Dobtra was older than Rinzin Namgyal, he should take over the Taring house, as that was also the place of our birth. Moreover, this estate had been conferred by the Tibetan government and hence Dobtra being the elder as well as having worked on the estate until now, should stay at Taring estate. As far as I was concerned, I had been staying in Lhasa serving as a Senampa and also Rinchen Drolma too had been staying in Lhasa and he [Rinchen Namgyal] served as a [kandrön](#) for nine years or so. I therefore suggested that Dobtra should take charge of Taring estate. But this suggestion of mine did not go over well with Dobtra. I said that since I have relinquished my share, now Dobtra was the elder (elder to Rinzin Namgyal) so he should be given the first choice. When he was given the first choice, Dobtra said that he wanted to stay on the Dobtra estate. Dobtra had stayed quite a long period of time at this estate and he had good rapport with the [miser](#) of the estate. I felt sad when brother Dobtra declined to go to the Taring estate, as there was no one to look after it.

In the end, we had to appoint one of our servants as the manager in charge of the estate. He was at the Taring estate until the 'Liberation.' I and Dobtra had no opportunity to go to our estate except for a day or two during our trips to India. Dobtra [also] did not stay at Dobtra, but went to Shigatse and constructed the Dobtra house in Shigatse. He did this perhaps under the influence of his wife who was the daughter of Delerapten. I did not have a chance to go to Shigatse as I had been too busy in Lhasa. Dobtra was never commissioned as a government officer. He stayed on our estate. Our situation was similar to the Phala brothers. Phala's eldest brother, the [drönyerchemmo](#) and the youngest brother, the Phogpön were in Lhasa, while their middle brother stayed on the Phala estate in Gyantse. Similarly, I and my youngest brother, Rinzin Namgyal, stayed in Lhasa and

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our middle brother, Dobtra, stayed on the estate. Later, brother Dobtra went to the Dobtra Estate and built a beautiful Dak Bungalow at Dobtra and stayed there.

I went to Lhasa after completing my machine-gun training and soon was appointed a [depön](#) and continued to work in this post. The late 13th Dalai Lama used to inspect the military exercises and used to take keen interest in the assembling and disassembling of the machine-guns. It was at this juncture that the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment was started. Every morning, the twenty five soldiers who had taken the machine gun training had to do drills and other exercises, so that they would not lose whatever they had been taught.

Q

Who was the instructor at that time?

A

There was one man whose name I don't remember. He was related to Major Sherab. Yuthok and I were soon given staff residences at the old Yamön [ch. ya men]. We then started recruiting soldiers by 'putting seals' on their hands and we also cut their hair in the [Western] army style.

Q

Were you both (Taring and Yuthok) [depön](#)?

A

Yes, we were both [depön](#) because there were 1000 soldiers. We became [depön](#) much later. Still later, it didn't look good to have 2 [depön](#) in one Regiment, so Kujar made some changes. He made one of us the [depön](#) and the other as acting [depön](#). They got special cap badges from the [Trapchi](#) office. The uniforms were ordered from Kolcutta. The best quality uniforms were ordered. The belts were known as Sandrome belts and the helmets were ordered from Cock. These were very high quality. They were also very light. When you press them with your fingers it would rise up. Since it was during the British regime, the production was of excellent quality. The regiment was a favorite of Kujar. The Gusung Regiment had fallen from its former power and prestige.

Q

Did it?

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A

Kujar had ordered the [Trapchi](#) office to get all the Nambu [tib. snam bu] (woven woolen material) dyed. These materials were collected from the families whose sons were in the regiment. Each family was asked to supply only white [nambu](#) material and the [Trapchi](#) office had to dye them. This was to ensure that the uniforms would have the same color and shade. The uniforms were dyed in Khaki - you know, the color of a walnut shell. The winter uniform was made out of these woolen materials and the summer uniform was made out of Khaki colored cotton. All the soldiers wore helmets.

Q

The Indian fabric that is worn nowadays?

A

No. Nowadays only the officers wear them. At that time, the British soldiers would wear them. Nowadays, you don't see these helmets anywhere. He [Kujar] would take great care about the soldiers. He would mix pills specially blessed by the Dalai Lama in the soldiers' tea and porridge. He would bring sacks of special dry meat made in Yamdrog [tib. yar 'brog] in the jeep to be mixed with the porridge. He was very kind to the soldiers. Since the Northern Gate of the military regiment lied close to the Northern Gate of the [Trapchi](#) office, at first the soldiers would line up in parade formation to salute the officers and specially Kujar. Yuthok and Kujar were very close friends. He was [kandrön](#). Yuthok, Ngabö and me were among the officers. The present Ngabö was the [rupön](#). Then there were 3 [gyagpön](#). One, called Chöndze, had come from Darjeeling and another one was the present bridegroom of Tsepel of Samdrupling [tib. bsam grub gling]. Didn't he work as the [kandrön](#) of Ngabö later?

Q

Yes, yes.

A

The third Gyagpön was an ex-monk who was the manager of Ditru. So these were the [gyagpön](#). There was one [rupön](#) and 2 [depön](#). Every morning when Kujar came by jeep, we

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six officers had to stand by to salute him. In the evenings, I don't remember giving him a formal send off. We used to have military drills twice a day, daily.

Q

When you all stood by to salute Kujar, would he stop his Jeep and talk to you?

A

No, he wouldn't stop. He would drive straight on. However, if he had something to say concerning some work, then he would stop and give instructions.

Q

Would he acknowledge your salutes by saluting back?

A

Yes. We really slogged in the [Trapchi](#) parade ground. The sun used to be so hot and there were no trees at all on that huge ground. On the northern side was our regiment's camp. The camp was newly constructed. In the [Trapchi](#) compound there were many trees planted, but our military area was newly constructed so there were no trees. We lived like a lizard. We had to drill twice a day. Once in the morning and once in the evening from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.. In the afternoon we had a break.

Q

Was there any administrative work?

A

No, there was no administrative work at all.

Q

How did you handle the records of the soldiers' leaves of absence?

A

These were dealt with during the noon break by all of us.

Q

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Was this done by Tibetan custom?

A

Drill is drill. But there were other matters concerning the camp, like consultation with Kujar about the camp and soldiers, and so on. At that time, Kujar was very strict about the discipline in the camp. Once he whipped a [gyagpön](#) or a [rupön](#) 50 lashes. He was screaming in pain. So you can imagine how strict Kujar was.

Q

After punishing him, Kujar's anger must have cooled off?

A

Whether he had cooled off or not, it was finished - I mean he got the 50 lashes. Around that time, the 13th Dalai Lama passed away. We already had a detailed discussion about this [see H.202].

Q

This Drongdag Regiment did not last for long - not for more than 2 years.

A

It lasted for about 2 years.

Q

Actually hadn't they planned to make this a very good and efficient regiment? How many soldiers were there?

A

Yes, that's true. Their original plan was to enlist a group of 1,000 soldiers and later there were 1,000 soldiers. They had plans to reform and upgrade the soldiers. Before, during Tsarong's time, they had made lot of changes and reforms. Later they couldn't complete these plans since the abbots of the various monasteries were dead set against improving and bringing about changes in the military. It was like the proverb, "The wind blew the paper." [tib. shog sbug rlung 'tshang]. They also wouldn't let the schools be modernized.

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Q

About the schools - wasn't there an attempt to form an English school that was unsuccessful? And then wasn't there something about playing football (soccer) and they said that it's like kicking the Buddha's head and so on. Can you tell us something about this in detail?

A

It's like a story tale.

Q

Actually all history is like a story.

A

I used to go to an English school in India.

Q

While you were a [depön](#)?

A

I would leave for school in March and return in November. We had 3 months vacation. It took about a month and half to reach home from school and only about a month and half was left to spend at home. During those days there used to be a British Garrison and Trade Agency at Gyantse. So we used to keep in contact with the officers and the representative of the Trade Agency. They would visit us once or twice a week. They would visit us without fail once a fortnight. In our area there were lot of wild animals so they would come for a hunt. They would take their lunch there, hunt and then go back. I used to accompany them sometime on horseback. Since I could converse in English, I was quite friendly with them. I remember them clearly. I used to go fishing with them. Near Nenyang [tib. gnas rnying], two rivers joined. The Nyangchu [tib. myang chu] river comes from Ralung and the Gangro Chu river comes from Khangmar [tib. khang dmar] and these two could merge near the Nenyang Monastery. We would go there for fishing. They had motor service between Phari and Gyantse. Previously you had to go either on horses or mules for about 15 to 20 miles before you reached a Dak Bungalow. Each Bungalow had

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a man to look after the mules. At that time, before the motor service was introduced, they had installed a telephone. So these people would eagerly wait for us.

Q

Was there telephone service?

A

Yes, there was. You know one year 'King Sahib' [Mr. King] came. He had a person working for him known as Rose Mear. When we used to go back and forth to school we would run into them. Again I would go with them to hunt grouse [tib. sreg pa], rabbits and so on.

Q

When did the telephone first come to Tibet?

A

Kyibuk was one of the staff members, I cannot remember the exact date.

Q

Was it while you were still attending school?

A

Yes.

Q

Then it must have been around 1929 to 1930?

A

Yes. It was around 1927 to 1928. I got married in 1929, and before that they had already installed the telephones. They had even connected the phones up to Lhasa. The person in charge of getting the telephone lines installed was Mr. King and his staff member Mr. Rose Mear. Kyibuk was their interpreter.

Q

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You mean Kyibuk Chola [older male relative of the same generation]?

A

Yes - Kyibuk Chola.

Q

Was the telephone one of those old-fashioned ones that you had to hold the mouthpiece and the receiver separately and then wind something? Was it one of those?

A

Yes, that's the one.

So, those days when I used to sit and fish I would see these vehicles coming and going. It was supposed to be a big improvement. The roads were narrow, barely wide enough for the vehicles to pass. It was just a poorly constructed road. You know I had to go regularly to school and come back for vacations. I used to dress real crazy. I would look like a Westerner, a Tibetan and a Nepalese all wrapped into one. Sometimes I would go attired in a Tibetan dress and wear [Yadong](#) boots and if the sun was too hot, I would sport a topi [hat]. I must have been strange sight. Anyway, while fishing, I would see these vehicles coming and going, raising a minor dust storm. Nowadays all the air fields are tarred and cemented but once I had seen a plane at Nepal. It raised so much dust that I couldn't see the plane landing. Similarly, these vehicles raised a lot of dust. Gyantse was a dusty town and there were lots of fish in the river. At that time Labnol Sahib was there. He had been specifically invited through the Political Officer of Sikkim. Surkhang was invited from Lhasa, Derge [sey](#) Kesang Wangdü [tib. sde dge sras skal bzang dbang 'dus] was there, Kharna [tib. mkhar sna], Lheding [tib. lha lding], Möntso [tib. smon tsho], the upper class people of Gyantse, Joktre [tib. lcog bkra] and the son of the dzong's clerk [tib. las drung] and we 2 were there [for the English school].

Q

Your uncle?

A

When we two were there it was long before. Before they had opened a school in Gyantse, McDonald Sahib had opened Tharchin Babu's small school. I was in that school.

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Q

Did Tharchin Babu open a small school in Gyantse?

A

Yes, he opened a school at the old Janglo [tib. lchang lo] House. Tharchin Babu was the teacher. There were about 15 to 20 students.

Q

McDonald Sahib was the principal?

A

He was the trade agent. I don't know whether it was out of sheer kindness or some other motives, but with his help this school was opened. Only after this school was closed, did Mr. Ludlow open his school.

Q

Why or how did this school close down?

A

McDonald Sahib had finished his term.

Q

I think he opened this school because of his personal interest. When McDonald Sahib left, did he give the school to Tharchin Babu?

A

Yes. Then Ludlow arrived. When I was coming from Darjeeling for a vacation he invited me for lunch. He told me to come and visit the school. So Mr. Ludlow showed me the school. He was wearing a solar topi. I met Derge [sey](#), my younger brother, Surkhang Lhatop [tib. lha stobs], and [Delerabten](#) there. They were the better students. Then all of a sudden, the school was closed and the Trade Agent's motor service between Gyantse and Phari was stopped.

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Q

Why?

A

The reason why the vehicles were stopped was that the local people had sent a petition. I was a student and I didn't really grasp what was going on, but the people of Phari and Gyantse had sent a petition objecting to the further continuation of the motor service. They said that their main source of income was by transporting baggage. If all the baggage was transported by vehicles, then we won't get any business. Without business, how can we earn a living. We have been earning our income by transporting baggage on horses, mules and so on like the saying "we are getting food from the saddle" [tib. lto sga thog nas 'tshol]. So they must have sent this petition to the abbots of the Sera, Drepung and Ganden. Anyway, the motor service was stopped.

Q

Was an order issued that one cannot drive vehicles?

A

Yes, they said that the motor service should be discontinued.

Q

This vehicle belonged to the Trade Agent. Was it forbidden to drive it? Who had the power to issue such an order?

A

The Government of Tibet issued such an order. They said that our people have sent such and such a petition and we cannot allow you to continue your motor service. That's it. The people's grievances were quite true. The road between Gyantse and Phari happened to be the trade route between Lhasa and India and most of the people en route earned their living by hiring out their horses, mules, yaks and oxen as baggage animals. While going to India, they used other routes, but when coming to Tibet, most traders preferred this route. All the government's trade was also carried out by this route. So you see, the motor vehicle did affect the people's livelihood. Whatever the case may be, the motor service

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was stopped at the same time that the school was closed. The school had just been newly opened at Gyantse behind the old Janglo House at Shogdrub [tib. shog sgrub]. They had constructed the building specially for the school and then just closed it down. The Gyantse Trade Agent took over the school house. Before that, [the Trade Agents] had been staying at the Palgön Chöde [tib. dpal mgon chos sde] monastery.

Q

Why did they close down the school?

A

They said it was not proper. There were various reasons.

Q

What was the main reason?

A

There was no main reason. It was due to lot of collective incidents.

Q

Was the previous Dalai Lama alive?

A

It was true that we needed to educate our youngsters in English. The government had made arrangements for a headmaster, school, textbooks and stationery. All the text books were ordered from India and they were good. But they closed the school and took everything, even the desks, to Lhasa. How strange!

Q

Why did they close the school at Gyantse?

A

They just said that it won't do.

Q

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Did they say that it should be shifted at Lhasa?

A

I don't know whether they said that it should be shifted to Lhasa or not, but when I went to attend my school in India, it had been closed.

Q

I see. One fine day they just closed the school.

A

Whatever the case may be, when I was in the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment, again they said that they would open a school at Trungji Linga [tib. drung spyi gling ga] [in Lhasa]. A man named Mr. Parker had arrived [as headmaster].

Q

Was he an Indian?

A

No, he had been specially invited from England. He made the classrooms with style. He asked us to help him. Naturally, we assisted him as local cooperation and help. The Kashag had, what should we say, given lengthy rules and regulations, the list of these was about a yard long. He held it in his hand and had a photograph taken. I remember this incident very vividly.

Q

But he couldn't read them since it was written in Tibetan script.

A

Yes, he couldn't read them, but all the details he knew since it had been translated for him. Again the school was closed and Mr. Parker was sent back.

Q

How did this happen?

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A

The normal thing. They held a meeting and decided to close the school.

Q

At that time were you in the government service?

A

Yes, I was serving the government. As usual, they held a Tsondu and all the abbots raised strong objections. Some of them even shed tears and therefore finally the school was closed. The abbots had been instigated and wrongly led like the proverb, "The deity was possessed by the ghost." [tib. lha khog 'dre zhugs].

Q

Can you tell about this vividly, in detail?

A

Among Drepung, Sera and Ganden monasteries, Chinese spies had infiltrated, even among the abbots. So, they instigated the other abbots and stopped the school from functioning.

Q

Can you tell us at which Tsondu which abbots raised objections?

A

It was a Tsondu hragdu held on top of the Labrang [Jokhang]. I think it was the Töpa [tib. stod pa] Khenpo who stood up, with tears in his eyes, and said that if you open an English school and this influence spreads then it would harm the teachings of Lord Buddha. He further said that once the English language spreads, it would overshadow our own language and then people will lose faith in our religion and it will also erode our Tibetan culture and tradition. Therefore, unless we stop this practice, it will have dire consequences. So this, the second school that had been opened, was also closed.

Q

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Was there no Government official who opposed and argued against the abbots?

A

What answers could one give? Everyone had to agree with him. There was no one who dared to oppose him. There was no question of opposing him. It was like the saying, "Whatever they did was seen as a good thing." [tib. ci mdzad legs par mthong].

Q

There was no reason to fear him. It was a meeting and not an order from the Töpa Khenpo?

A

At that time, we used to play soccer. We decided that it was not good to spend all our time playing mahjong, so to keep ourselves occupied, we decided to play soccer and hockey. Some of us younger officials got together and formed a team of [kudrak](#). There was another team comprised of traders, and a Muslim's team and team from [Dekyilinga](#) [tib. bde skyid gling ga]. We formed 4 teams to compete among ourselves. They were very keenly contested matches. The arrangements were made very elaborately with much pomp and show.

Q

I heard the uniforms were made with much care? The [kudrak](#) team shirt was made out of silk embroidered with a snow lion.

A

That's correct.

Q

What was the name of the team?

A

The name was "Kudrak's team." We didn't have any special name for our club. Then once when the [Dekyilinga](#) team and our team were playing a match, it hailed heavily. The Tsidrung Ling Park was near the field. So all the people picnicking came over. In the

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evening around 5 o'clock, the field had been marked with lines and set up for the game to begin. All of a sudden, a rabbit came onto the field. The rabbit ran around the field trying to find a way out. All the spectators said "look, look!" When all the crowd shouted like this, it became a mighty roar. So people started saying that it was a sign of the 21 bad omens [tib. Itas ngan]. Anyway, the game started and it was when we were leading - I think the score was 2 to 1 in our favor - that the hail came down. Right after that, a cloud appeared from the hill called the Cannon Hill [tib. me sgyog ri] and there was a hail storm. Each hail was the size of a thumb. The shape had come to watch the match with red umbrellas. The hail came down so furiously that in a short time all these umbrellas were tattered and torn.

Q

Completely tattered?

A

Yes. The next day they said it was too much.

Q

Who?

A

The Shöga. They said that why do you have to play such foreign games that have never been played before. They fined us one or two [sang](#) of gold (tib. Sersang [gser srang]) each. So that was the end of soccer games.

Q

When was this?

A

It happened when I had just finished serving in the Drongdag Regiment.

Q

Was the 13th Dalai Lama alive?

A

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No.

Q

Was Reting the Regent?

A

Yes.

Q

I had heard that it was during Taktra's regency?

A

Reting did not take notice of such things. It was the middle rank officials who created all sorts of unnecessary talk and objections. Their talk reached the [tsidrung](#) during their morning tea session, the [drungja](#). At these tea sessions, the lay official cannot attend. It was only for the [tsidrung](#) like the Talama, the [Trunyichemmo](#), the [khenche](#) and the [khenjung](#) and other Letsenpa. Before the morning tea session they would just gossip about everything. It's more like a newspaper office. They gossiped about everything. About happenings in Lhasa or the surrounding areas. So all this talk would eventually reach the Regent.

Q

How did such talk drift to the Regent's ear?

A

It's only natural. The [drönyerchemmo](#), [nendrön](#), tsendrön and other people who attended the morning tea sessions passed on this gossip.

Q

I have another question to ask you. In Lhasa they opened an English school. For how long did it remain open?

A

Only for about 2 years.

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Q

For two years?

A

Yes.

Q

If the school was open for 2 years, maybe some of the students must have been able to converse in English?

A

Nothing like that happened. No positive contribution was made.

Q

What were the subjects taught in the school?

A

Only English was taught - Conversational English. It was really nothing. The reason why they closed it down had no logic behind it. It was like the ghost possessed in the deity's body. According to the 13th Dalai Lama's wishes, they had sent 4 students to England but when they returned, no new students were sent. Actually they should have sent 8 students after the previous ones returned and when these 8 students returned, they must send 18 more, like this, they must slowly increase the number of students going abroad. When the original 4 students returned, they were not given jobs according to their training. For instance, Kyibuk was trained in communications to look after the telegram and post, but he was appointed as the estate manager of Sey [tib. zas gzhis sdod] and was put him inside a hill. Möndrong [tib. smon grong] was a geologist, but he was appointed as the [Shölpa](#), the Head of [Shöl](#) Legung. Gogkhar [tib. sgog mkhar ba] died, but otherwise he had done military studies. Ringang [tib. rin sgang] was an electrician, but he was made to work in the [Trapchi](#) Office. Sometimes, he would act as an interpreter. He went to England. Although he was the youngest, he must have been around 15 or 16 years old. He stayed for 3 to 4 years, came back, and again went back and stayed there for 3 to 4 years.

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Q

His English must have been pretty good?

A

Later he was the official interpreter. Then the 13th Dalai Lama passed away and the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment was disbanded by Lungshar's maneuvers, instigated as I told you before. Many of those soldiers were from Shigatse.

Q

This was because of [Lungshar](#), right?

A

Yes. Most of the soldiers did not know what was going on. They were told that they had to go for a meeting. Those few soldiers who knew what was going on took all their possessions like kitchen utensils and baggage with them. So, the [Drongdrag](#) was disbanded and the Gusung Regiment went down and took over. I don't remember clearly all the details. Then Reting's incident arose. He was put under arrest and brought from his Reting Labrang. Then the Sera monastery supported Reting's case and the government had a great confrontation between the monastery and the Central Government.

Q

I heard that a clash took place between Sera and the Government?

A

Yes, there was a clash. At that time, I was there. I don't remember how I came to be there. Anyway, we had set up a machine gun at the middle of the hill on Sera's cremation ground. At that time, the Tri [tib. khri] Rinpoche and representatives of the traders came to mediate.

Q

You told me once that you had been summoned by [Kapshöba](#)?

A

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That's right. I had been told to come. I was at my house.

Q

You must have been scared?

A

It was at dawn when someone started knocking at the door. No, it was late at night. I was about to go to sleep. Someone knocked at the door. It was a tense situation. Reting was arrested. There were a lot of strange noises that were seen as a sign of bad omens. You could hear noises as if someone was moaning - it was really a frightening noise. Sometimes the noise would come from the Möndröl [tib. smon grol] Bridge and sometimes it would shout from the near the Chinese Muslim Mosque [tib. rgya lha khang] as if some woman was crying. It was said that Shri Devi [tib. lha mo], the protective deity, was displeased. I personally heard this spooky noise. There was lot of tension in the country. So, one night someone was knocking at the door late at night. I told them not to open the door at once. My wife Rinchen Drolma ran down grabbing the cloak and went out through the bathroom door and landed on top of the pile of ashes. From there she went into the kennel.

Q

She ran like Karchung Depön?

A

Yes, something like that. My late mother was escorted by Rinchen Namgyal [tib. rin chen rnam rgyal]. He took her near the well where he had made a place for her to stay. So it was difficult to know whether the knocker was a friend or foe. So I took my revolver and went out and laid down in the drain. I made my servant peep out. I told him not to open the door. So he said that there was a note for me from the [Trapchi](#) office. I told him to accept the note through the crack in the door. The brief note was from the [Trapchi](#) office. A soldier had come. In the note, I had been summoned to report the next day before sunrise by [Kapshöba](#) and [Gyambumgang](#) [tib. rje 'bum sgang]. He was the [nendrön](#).

Q

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Gyambumgang was not a [nendrön](#). Thupten Lengmön [tib. thub bstan legs smon] was the [nendrön](#). [Gyambumgang](#) was the powerful [Trunyichemmo](#). His nickname was "big nose" [tib. sna chen]. Those people were called the smaller Tibetan Government [tib. sde pa gzhung chung ba]. Those 2 were at [Trapchi](#).

A

Yes. The Gusung Regiment was sent up. The [Trapchi](#) soldiers were also summoned. The soldiers of Gyantse were also summoned from Gyantse and were told them to come marching day and night.

Q

Wow! That was really foolish.

A

Sera was assaulted with the combined forces of three regiments. Still the soldiers were scared of the Sera monks.

Q

When you went up, who all were there?

A

Kapshöba and [Gyambumgang](#) with all their staff were there.

Q

They were summoned on that day?

A

There were youngsters like [Shölkhang](#) Jedrung [tib. zhol khang rje drung]. So everyone had to prepare their own food. From our houses they would prepare special food and send it up. Everyone would divide into groups and share the food. Since every family had made special food for their husbands or sons, it almost looked like a banquet. I was told to prepare and look after the machine guns. So, I set up the machine guns.

Q

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Were you the [Laja](#)?

A

I think I was the [Laja](#).

Q

I think you were the [Laja](#) or you were in the [Trapchi](#) office. The machine guns were the same ones you had handled while you were in the [Trapchi](#) Regiment?

A

Yes, they were the same ones. Later, they asked me to look after the artillery. So I went to get the cannons. Previously, we had only cannons known as Ten Pounders. Later, we ordered some Howitzer cannons which had springs as shock absorbers. The Ten Pounders would give a tremendous recoil after being fired. After each shot we had to reset it all over again. During World War I, the British had used these cannons. Before firing, you had to tie the wheel and when you fired a shot, it would rear up like a horse and then fall down with a thud.

Q

Didn't it break?

A

Since it was tied down it could not recoil. Now the Howitzer was more refined and it didn't give all these troubles. Like the revolver, it had a thick spring which absorbed all the shock. After each shot, it would reload automatically. The weight of the shell was 12 pounds. The Howitzer was much more powerful. So, we fired a shot from the [Trapchi](#) office at Sera and the shell crossed over the Sera hill and landed in Phenpo [the valley beyond the mountain]. [laughter] I had no training in artillery. At that time no one knew where the shot had landed.

Q

What did [Kapshöba](#) say?

A

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On the second attempt, I made a better shot. It landed in the big window [tib. bar gsal] of top of Sera [tib. dbu rtse]. Through the window, it landed on one of the monk's quarters around the courtyard and on the steps under the main corridor [tib. sgo mchor] of the main monastery. We could see lot of dust rising from there. Then from there we could see a white scarf being waved. The reason why we fired the shot was because from the top of the hill the Gusung Regiment was sending us a signal by mirror reflections. The code had been translated from the English code into Tibetan. It was done rather well. So through this signal they would send us the instructions where to fire and where the monks were gathered. Actually, it was the monks who were being pressed. From the northern side the soldiers from Gyantse were assaulting, on the back side, the Gusung Regiment was deployed and the [Trapchi](#) soldiers were also there. So, at night, the 4th Rupön [tib. ru dpon bzhi pa] and some others went through Dogde [tib. dog bde] to Sera's back gate.

Q

What did [Kapshöba](#) say? Didn't he say that you were hopeless?

A

After one shell landed accurately they surrendered. They tied a white scarf on a pole and waved it to us. So, we did not fire. The famous Tsenya [tib. rtse nya] Trülku was there.

Q

I wonder if he was there?

A

I was told he was there. Then another shell was fired at Chöding [tib. chos lding]. I don't know what had happened, but a fire broke out there. It created quite a lot of havoc there. Then someone said that a shot should be fired at [Sera Je](#). They said all the troubles and problems were created from there. We must blast these "Barkok" [derogatory slang word used for monks -- it actually means a monk who lost his celibacy].

Q

Who said this?

A

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The [rupön](#) of the cannon operators. Then I said that there is no hurry. I offered them sweet tea and bread and cooled them down. I told them if we really wanted to blast them, it could be done in 5 to 6 minutes. All we had to do was to concentrate our fire on a spot and fire away with 2 or 3 cannons. But if we had to renovate it, it would take a long time. We must think about this. So we fired shots up at the rocks - just to scare them some more. We fired in between Chöding and the rocks. We were firing just for effect. We did not know that monks were hiding there. Then from the rocks the monks came out like ants - you could see small red figures running about. When the shell hit the rock, the sound reverberated and lots of shell-pieces and rocks flew about in chips. We had used the Howitzer with a shell known as common shell. It explodes on contact. We fired at Chöding also. We fired couple of rounds at the eastern side of the fences of Sera's circular path. We did not fire too many shots though.

Then they said it is better to come so we left 2 Howitzers behind at the Northern side of [Trapchi](#) and took 2 guns to Tsesumthang [tib. tshes gsum thang]. We thought that the monks might attack there. The Gyantse Regiment was going along the hill. On Tsesumthang, there were only 2 cannons. If a thousand monks came charging down from the top with a battle cry what could 2 cannons do?

Q

Yes, they couldn't do anything.

A

Supposing they just charged down? So we thought and used our heads. From the top, the monks were watching us through binoculars. We cut down willow trees, tied them up so that they had a reasonable resemblance to a cannon and then covered them with black tarpaulin. So we made more false cannons. We kept them at a little distance from each other. Of course, in reality, we could fire only 2 cannons. It was just a decoy. If you look from a distance, they will think we have 4 cannons. The important thing was to try to comprehend how your opponents will react. They were also firing at us. You know the Sera's gate which had a bent beam - they were firing from there.

Q

Yes, I know that.

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A

With a loud bang, they would fire their missiles which landed a little further behind us.

Q

Wow! It could reach so close?

A

Yes, it reached far. It was a round lead ball, a little bigger than a fist.

Q

It could prove very dangerous if it hit the cannon?

A

Impossible. They couldn't hit the cannons. It was just a round ball. But it could hit accidentally - that's possible.

Q

Who was the [depön](#)?

A

Tsögo [tib. mtsho sgo] was the [depön](#).

Q

Where was he going?

A

They had marched day and night without any sleep. They were dead tired.

Q

Was he the [depön](#) of the Gyantse Regiment?

A

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Yes. I was at Tsesumthang. So they praised us and said that we had done a good job.

Q

Who said this? [Kapshöba](#)?

A

Then the machine guns were kept on top of the [Trapchi](#) office.

Q

Supposing if the monks came down to [Trapchi](#), then what would happen?

A

That's exactly what we feared. If the monks came down charging, beating tin, brandishing a few guns and swords, numbering about a thousand or two? What could we do? We would be no match for them. And if they make a night attack? At night if they scaled the outer wall with ladders and surprised us, there was no alternative but to run away. It was easy to run towards Lhasa from behind the [Trapchi](#) office. We were sure to run. We had thought about the possibility of such an attack. If they attacked at night, we had made preparations - we had spread out the soldiers right from Terak. But at whom can you shoot if a few thousand monks charged down. What could the machine guns do? Actually, war is very strange. Then we were told to go to Reting so we said "Yes, sir." They said, we must take the artillery, so we took the howitzer and fired few shots at the wooded area at Reting and came back.

Q

At that time what was Reting doing?

A

Reting had been already brought to Lhasa. Everything was empty there, which made me feel sad. Before us, the soldiers had already gone there.

Q

Everything had been sacked?

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A

Yes.

Q

When was this? Was Kungö Samchok there?

A

At that time the [magji](#) was Ketsül [tib. skal tshul]. He had served as the Chief Trade Representative of Gyantse and his co-depön was [Shakabpa](#). They were the [magji](#). I don't really know if all the dead people were involved in the trouble or not, but they brought in lot of severed heads and hands. They also brought in a few people who were supposed to be spies. They had been kept on their knees.

Q

Were these prisoners monks from Reting?

A

Yes. I stayed back at the place called Phodrang Thang [tib. pho brang thang]. We didn't shell the monastery. When they said that we must fire at [Sera Je](#) from the Cherag area, the statue of the Deity Tamdrin [tib. rta mgrin] in Sera arose in my eyes. How could I fire at the Tamdrin of Sera? If one really wanted to blast Sera away, it could have been done in only a few minutes. I tried to calm everyone down. We could have done anything. If we had opened fire, everything would have been in ruins.

Q

Didn't you receive any orders saying not to open fire? Didn't they give instructions that you should cease fire?

A

The order was that we should take Sera and make the monks surrender. That was our order. Actually, this fight broke out after they could not reach a settlement through negotiation.

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Q

I see. Before the fight broke out, they tried to settle the matter through talking?

A

Yes, the Ganden Tri Rinpoche had come.

Q

Had Lhatsün [tib. lha btsun] Rinpoche also come?

A

Yes. The Traders' Representatives were also present. The Drepung representative had most probably also come.

Q

Did Drepung also come?

A

Anyway, they talked, but nothing came out of it.

Q

How did the talk take place and what did they talk about? Were you present when the talks took place?

A

We wouldn't know what talks took place. Anyway, Reting had been arrested and they wanted him to be freed.

Q

The Sera people?

A

Yes. Reting had been imprisoned in Sharchenjok. When he was first brought to Sharchenjok we were beneath the canopy of [Tse](#). Everyone said that Sera might attack

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and stage a rescue. At that time, Taktra's faction was there [in power]. We all knew that. They were very apprehensive. If Sera attacked it would create a big problem for everyone concerned. However, nothing happened. Reting was brought down from Dogde, passed by Cherag and the Lingkor [tib. gling skor] circumambulatory road and crossed the stone bridge behind Lukhangwa's house. He was brought in through the Eastern gate. No trouble erupted.

Q

I heard that some monks came down and opened fire?

A

Then the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment was dissolved and Reting landed up in serious trouble. I was still continuing as [Laja](#). I was a [Laja](#) for 18 years. Before becoming the [Laja](#), when the [Drongdrag](#) got disbanded, Yuthok served as the [depön](#) of the Gusung Regiment. After him I was in charge.

Q

And the remnants of the [Drongdrag](#) Army?

A

There were 250 soldiers left. So, I made them dig a well.

Q

The Gusung Regiment?

A

No. There 250 soldiers of the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment.

Q

From the Gusung Regiment, 250 soldiers were stationed?

A

The Gusung Regiment was later called back. So the 250 soldiers had nothing to do - no drills to practice. Since there was no well there, they dug a well. Later, when the [Trapchi](#)

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camp was shifted there from Jaotang [ch. jiao wu chang], the well became very useful. It was dug when there was a scarcity of water. The water was good and it became very useful. So, when Tsarong was the [Trapchi](#), he told me that it would be good idea if I joined the [Trapchi](#) staff, so I became a staff member.

Q

Did you have to report this to the government?

A

I think they must have reported it. Anyway, I was a staff member of the [Trapchi](#) office.

Q

If you did report, to whom did you have to report? Did you go to the [Trapchi](#) Office?

A

I had no official order. I just went personally to the [Trapchi](#) office - since I was unemployed.

Q

Was it that you went just like that? Without appointment or summons?

A

When I was idle with no work after the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment got disbanded, [Sawang](#) Tsarong took me with him.

Q

You just went along with him?

A

Yes. At that time, Langchungwa [tib. gnang byung ba] was also there. Tsarong was a [dzasa](#) and Langchungwa was the officer in charge. At that time, when I was in the [Trapchi](#) office, there was a lot of talk about fake currency notes. Someone had been printing fake 100 [sang](#) currency notes. I suggested that instead of carving the print by hand, we should photograph the Potala and send it to Kolcutta and get it printed on the 100 (sang) currency

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notes. It would look beautiful and to counterfeit it would be difficult. In my opinion, it was a very good idea. But he was shocked. He said, "Don't you ever say such things. People will say that the Potala is being used for commercial purposes. Furthermore, being a currency note, it would go to all sorts of places like under one's rump and so on. It would defile the sanctity of the holy Potala. What bigger sin can one commit?" There was no chance of my suggestion being accepted by Langchungwa. Then the Trisam [tib. khri zam] Bridge was constructed. The Trisam Bridge would be annually broken by the river when it was in spate. It is said that it was sort of a curse on the people of that area due to their [karma](#). Every year the local people had to rebuild it. The people of [Shölpa](#) went willingly. At that time, [Sambo](#) was the [Shölpa](#). After [Sambo](#), Sarchung [tib. gсар byung] was there.

Q

You mean [Sambo](#) Tenzin Thöndup [tib. bstan 'dzin don grub]?

A

No, [Sambo](#) the shape - Tenzin Thöndup's father. So it was decided that [Sambo](#) would undertake to construct the Trisam Bridge and me and the [drönyerchemmo](#) nicknamed, "Old Dog" [tib. khyi rgas po] were the staff members.

Q

How did the [drönyerchemmo](#) happen to be there? Was he without a job?

A

The [drönyerchemmo](#) was among the retinue of the former Dalai Lama when he had gone to Kham and Mongolia.

Q

Yes, I heard that. Since the Dalai Lama had passed away, the [drönyerchemmo](#) was out of a job.

A

Yes. I did all the correspondence. The map and plans were drawn by T. E. Thompson of Kolcutta.

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Q

Was Thompson British?

A

Yes, he was. There was a big company there - dealing in iron. Now after chalking out the plans and measurements - one year was divided into 3 parts - according to the size of the Trisam river. In winter the river became smaller and during summer the river became broader. The center span of the bridge was 108 feet long. Out of this, they put 4 ft. on the sides as well so that there was only 100 ft. Similarly, on the outer bridge they have 66 ft. on each side and out of this 6 ft. each was made up of wall. Overall, the bridge span was 220 ft. So they said if it had to be completed in one year, it would give a lot of trouble to the people. I mean they had to transport the cement, iron and so on. The iron bars had to be loaded on horse's backs. So they would transport the materials for one year and rest. The construction would go on the next year. So for the transporters, they would get a year's respite. So the work went on in alternative year - one year only transporting the materials and the next year only construction. It took six years to complete the bridge.

Q

It was constructed rather well.

A

Yes. After that every year the bridge did not get washed away. We had to take great care while laying the foundation. We made some little changes in the original plan. Tsarong and I would discuss and make few improvements. Babu Thai Sing, the previous Dalai Lama's driver, was also with us. So we dug down and diverted the water and the remaining water we pumped out. Then we built stone pillars out of Gyado. In between these, we put stones. According to the plan, we were supposed to put wooden pillars, but the wooden pillars wouldn't go down. I think the ground was too rocky. We had cut wood according to the size mentioned in the plan, but it was not possible. So we put in stone and other such materials. However, we followed the sizes and measurements dutifully according to the plans. We would put stones inside the stone pillar, cement them up and again lay stone pillars and finally tie them with iron rods. Anyway, until the bridge pier [tib. zam bum] was erected, we left about a yard and the rest we stuffed them with stone, cement and iron

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rods as mentioned before. On top, for the remaining one yard, chains were attached and it was closed something like a [momo](#). The outer borders were covered with planks and welded together. The finishing touches were carried out according to the plan.

Q

It wasn't a suspension bridge?

A

No, no! It was an iron bridge. In the center it was stuffed with stones, the outer coverings were of concrete almost 10 inches thick on the pillar - very similar to the buildings in India. So it was very strong and very strongly made. However, the Chinese have dismantled it and made different smaller bridges in different areas of Tölung. The bridge we had constructed could be easily dismantled since we had used screws. The Chinese dismantled them and made use of the materials. So this is how I spent six years of my life building a bridge under the supervision of Tsarong [Shape](#).

Q

Did you stay at the site for the 6 years?

A

Yes.

Q

Where?

A

At Gyaritsel [tib. rgya ri tshal]. It was a good estate belonging to Drepung [Loseling](#).

Q

When Tsarong undertook this project, wasn't there any opposition from the various monasteries?

A

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Yes, we had to face so many problems. They all brought different Government land tenure documents showing various tax exemptions and so on. But Tsarong did not listen to anyone. Besides, Tsarong was very well known and highly respected by everyone. He was also quite powerful, but not as powerful as he was before falling from the late 13th Dalai Lama's grace. So when anyone brought these documents, Tsarong did not listen to them saying that the government itself was working for this project and since the government is not exempt from this project, how can you be exempted? This was what he used to say and somehow we managed since people respected him highly. Drepung [Loseling](#) and [Nechung](#) Tratsang had very strong documents written on yellow brocade. They brought these documents, but Tsarong refused to look at them. He would say no. No arguments, no favoritism and no special considerations when the government itself is paying taxes [doing this as a tax], and when the government itself is not exempted, how can you. Besides, this will benefit all of you. Instead you must join us voluntarily and not look at it as a tax. So, everyone collaborated with him.

Q

Well, they might have listened to him, but sometimes if they can't convince the officer directly, they might raise this issue at the Tsondu through the abbots.

A

No such thing happened. It would have been difficult for them to raise any objection since it would benefit the people. Moreover, the abbots had great respect for Tsarong. He also handled this situation in joking manner - said that the project will be carried out with everyone's volunteer cooperation. So, everybody obeyed him and we were able to complete it. After that we were sent to build a road in the Nam [tib. snam] area.

Q

Did the Tibetan Government really take a keen interest in building roads and bridges? Earlier there was none. So how come they were showing interest then?

A

We were sent there to build the road. It was called the Gyukpa Thang [tib. rgyug pa thang]. The reason it was called Gyukpa Thang is because there were two wooden beams put across the river between 2 rocky passes. Thousands of animals had to pass across

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this narrow bridge. That's why it is so named. (Gyukpa means beam in Tibetan.) If one fell, you go straight into the river and there is no chance at all of surviving. So we built the road so that people and mules did not have to cross this dangerous bridge. We built a broad road along the river. During winter, this was not much of a problem because the river was shallow, but during summer when the river was swollen, it was impossible to cross. Mr. Tsarong said that the road should be 16 ft. wide and we built a very strong rock wall so that it could not be destroyed easily. Much, much later, people did not maintain the road so that sometimes rocks would fall on the road and cause inconvenience to the travelers. While building the road, we made a small track on which trailers could be used. Huge rocks were lifted by cranes and loaded into the trailers and unloaded into the river. That's how we built the foundation in the water. Unless huge rocks were used, the smaller ones would be carried away by the river. That's how we worked.

Q

Was all the responsibility shouldered by you or was Tsarong there to supervise?

A

Yes. It was after we had constructed the bridge. Tsarong and his whole team were sent down. At that time Tsarong faced great difficulties. The Kashag told him that while your suggestions to build bridges and roads may be good, what is more important to the people are their crops. If your activities pose any disturbances to their crops then it will create a great deal of trouble. So the Kashag was not in favor of building roads bridges. So we had a lot of problems in getting the necessary grain and cash.

Q

Why do you need grain and cash?

A

We had to pay people for working.

Q

I thought the Government didn't pay people at all.

A

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No. They got paid although not as much as paid by the private sector. The government gave them some cash as well as tea, butter and so on. We had to face a great deal of problems. There was no place to live, so we pitched a tent and lived there during spring, summer, winter and fall. Tsarong faced far greater problems. Sometimes the government would not allocate money to him and he had to spend money from his own pocket. Later when he built a bridge in Drepung, the government did not pay a single penny and all the expenses had to be borne by him - personally. I was not there to help him then so whenever Tsarong suggested anything, people would say, 'ok,' because people respected him, but when he went to collect the expenses or grants, then they would stall. They would say that the road has been there ever since the universe was created and it will be there in the future. These were the few individuals who were uneducated. After completing the road, I remained as the [Laja](#) head for 18 long years. The Laja's main job was to look after the religious revenue of the government.

Q

When did the post of [Laja](#) come into existence?

A

It started from the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama.

Q

Did it?

A

Yes, there were two offices - the [Laja](#) office and the Trelde [tib. 'phral bde] office. The Trelde office was at the [Tse](#). It was sort of an office where you could get the things at once on the spot. It was like a mini storehouse. The [Laja](#), on the other hand, was like the government's revenue office.

Q

Was it? Wasn't it the supply office?

A

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No. It was not the supply office. It collected the revenue [tib. 'bab]. Now there were different kinds of revenue. It did not collect much grain. It collected only the kinds of items that were required in religious activities, for example, butter, planks, medicinal herbs, iron, fabrics, dry fruits and other such things. The [obligations to provide these] were divided among the various dzongs. All these taxes in-kind had been divided among the various [dzong](#) since the times of Desi Sangye Gyatso [tib. sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho]. All these taxes had been divided among the local areas. These records have been written down with great care. All the papers were the finest Bhutanese paper and Yamdrog [tib. yar 'brog] had to offer eggs and fishes (dried).

Q

Oh! I see. It was because of the lake they had there?

A

Yes, because of the lake. At that time, it seems that there were no restrictions against hunting and fishing. I think at that time the sources of revenue were very wide. For example, the eggs could be collected in the thousands near the Yamdrog lake from a rocky hill [from migrating ducks].

Q

Do you know whether the eggs were those of chickens, ducks or pigeons?

A

They were duck eggs.

Q

The eggs were laid on the shores of the lake?

A

They were laid in the center of the lake, on the island in the center of the lake known as Yamdrog Ling [tib. gling].

Q

Is it the famous Yamdrok Karmoling?

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A

That's correct. So there was revenues in eggs and dry fish. One wing of the [Laja](#) office was renovated. At this time we had to take out everything from one of the rooms and when we did this we found a lot of baskets of fish. Of course, only the bones were left. The flesh and skin had disintegrated with the years.

Q

Was that because it had been kept there for ages?

A

Yes. And due to the time that had passed, only the shells of the eggs were left. The butter loads that were covered with skin had turned into wood. No grease was left. In the office of the [Laja](#), most of the revenue of butter was spent on religious offerings of butter lamps. Thousands of loads of butter each load weighing roughly 80 pounds. All this butter was collected from all over the country. In [Tö](#), there were nomads, in the north you had the four northern areas (tib. Jangrig [byang rigs]), and in the east you had Kongpo and so on.