

The Song of Establishment 22

*We are the Vikasi
The Chinese snatched Tibet from us
and kicked us out from our home
Even then, India
kept us like their own
One day, surely one day
we will teach the Chinese a lesson
Whenever opportunities arise
we will play with our lives
In the Siachen glacier
we got our second chance
Our young martyrs
have no sadness whatsoever
Whether it is Kargil or Bangladesh
we will not lose our strength
Whenever opportunities arise
we will play with our lives
Where there is our Potala Palace
and lovely Norbulingka
The throne of the Dalai Lama
was dear even then
Remember those martyrs of ours
who sacrificed with their lives
Let's sing together
Hail to our Tibet!
Hail to our Tibet!
Hail to our Tibet!*

The First Months of the Tibetan Army

Claude Arpi

An aspect which has not often been researched but is the outcome of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict, is the creation of a Special Frontier Force (SFF). It was to be ready to infiltrate into Tibet after six months following its creation. This did not happen, but it is worth looking at the first months of the Tibetan Army.

The Creation of the Establishment 22

For most Indians, November 14 means the birthday of Jawaharlal Nehru, but there is also another anniversary, albeit an 'uncelebrated' one, falling on the same day; the latter has for long been kept secret, as it marks the creation of the Special Frontier Forces (SFF), the Tibetan Army (also known as Vikas Regiment or the 'Two-Twos'). It was founded a week before China's unilateral cease-fire in the 1962 conflict. There might have been an invisible link between the two 'birthdays', but we will possibly never know why the formation of the Tibetan Army was initiated on November 14.

Did BN Mullik, the then Director of the Intelligence Bureau or DIB (and one of the main culprits of the 1962 fiasco) want to please Nehru on his birthday by telling him that he 'had found a solution' to China's military superiority? The Tibetans would themselves 'liberate' Tibet!

Mullik immediately realised he would need outside help for his project; he obviously looked towards the United States.

On November 19, the day Nehru sent two panicky letters to the US President asking for help for India,¹ a crucial meeting to respond to Nehru's requests was held in the White House. The then Secretary of Defence Robert

¹ See: http://www.archieve.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/Inder1.pdf

McNamara, the Secretary of State Dean Rusk, as well as his Assistant for Far Eastern Affairs, Averell Harriman, a respected diplomat and politician, were present. The CIA bosses were also in attendance.

The declassified US archives² tell us: "McNamara urged that the first move be to find out what the real situation was. If we were to put our prestige and resources at risk, we must find out the score. He proposed sending a small high-level military mission immediately to Delhi. ...McNamara again urged getting a high level mission out to Delhi, including State and Intelligence people in order to concert a plan of action with the Indians."

This is what happened.

The American Version

Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison in their book *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*³ recounted: "Also mentioned (during the meeting) was the possibility of using the CIA's Tibetan guerrillas. John McCone, a wealthy and opinionated Republican chosen by Kennedy to replace CIA Director Dulles after the Bay of Pigs, was on hand to brief the President on such covert matters. Joining McCone was Des FitzGerald, the [CIA's] Far East chief." McNamara's delegation arrived in India three days later; during their stay, the CIA officials held lengthy discussions with BN Mullik. According to Conboy, who quoted from David Blee, the CIA station chief in India: "The Indians were interested in the Tibet program because of its intelligence collection value ...Mullik was particularly interested in paramilitary operations." The DIB and his deputy ML Hooja⁴ made a special request

² See *Foreign Relations of the United States*;

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v19/d202>.

³ Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War*

⁴ ML Hooja later became the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (between January 1968 to February 1971).

during a session with FitzGerald and Blee. "They made us promise that our involvement would remain secret forever."

By the end of the Harriman mission, the CIA and IB had agreed to a division of tasks; the IB with CIA support would train a 5,000-strong tactical guerrilla force; the CIA's Far East Division would create a strategic long-range resistance movement inside Tibet and the Tibetan freedom fighters in Mustang⁵ would remain under the CIA's control.

The honeymoon with the CIA did not last long and the Tibetan Force would eventually be built with purely Indian inputs under the supervision of Maj Gen Sujjan Singh Uban⁶.

Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison have written a romanticized version of these events; reading their account, it is as if it was the CIA which was entirely running the show. They explained that it was Krishna Menon⁷ and Lt Gen BM Kaul⁸ who decided "to create a guerrilla force that could strike deep behind Chinese lines. Because the Chinese were coming from Tibet, members of that ethnic group were the logical guerrillas of choice. Finding volunteers would not be a problem; both knew that there was no shortage of Tibetans on Indian soil, and virtually all were vehemently anti-Chinese and would not hesitate to take up arms for their own patriotic reasons."

Putting the CIA always on the center stage, the US Spy agency wondered who could lead such a force: "They needed a senior Indian officer who could win the confidence of the Tibetans, embracing their independent nature and promoting a semblance of discipline without resort to a rigid army code. And he would need to have a bent (of mind) for the unconventional-something that was in short supply in the Indian military."

⁵ In Northern Nepal.

⁶ The SSF became later known as 'Establishment 22' or 'Two-twos' because Uban had earlier served as commander of the 22 Artillery Mountain Regiment.

⁷ VK Krishna Menon was made to resign as Defence Minister on October 30, 1962.

⁸ Lt Gen BM Kaul only resigned in 1963.

The CIA 'historians' wrote: "As they scoured the roster of available officers, one name caught their eye. Brigadier Sujan Singh Uban, until recently the commander of the 26th [22] Artillery Brigade in Kashmir, was in New Delhi after having just processed his retirement papers;" by their version, the CIA could pick up any officer in the Indian Army, for a particular job.

The authors argued that Uban had spent much time with mountain units and was familiar with fighting at high altitudes. Furthermore, during a stint as an artillery instructor for jungle warfare units, he had earned the nickname 'Mad Sikh', "this small detail was enough for Menon and Kaul" to summon the brigadier.

According to the US writers, on 26 October, 1962, Uban was given sketchy details of the proposed behind-the-lines guerrilla mission⁹: "Working with the Tibetans would not be easy, warned Kaul. Disciplining them, he said, would be like taming wild tigers. As a sweetener, the brigadier was promised a second star in due course. Uban was hooked; he grabbed the assignment without hesitation."

Later an emissary was sent from the Intelligence Bureau to Darjeeling to fetch the Dalai Lama's brother, Gyalo Thondup: "After years of attempting to court the Indians - who were often sympathetic but never committal - Gyalo relished the moment as he sat in front of a select group of senior intelligence and military officials in the capital."

Thondup Gyalo told the meeting that he needed 5,000 volunteers.

The following exchange is ludicrous: "Would Gyalo prefer that the Intelligence Bureau or the Ministry of Defense be involved?"

"Not Defense," he would have said.

The story continued "The very next day¹⁰, Prime Minister Nehru made an unequivocal request for US military assistance. For the tired, beaten leader,

⁹ It is doubtful, that this happened so quickly.

¹⁰ November 19, 1962.

it was a humbling overture. It was an admission not only that his central belief in peaceful coexistence with the PRC was irrevocably shattered but also that his cordial relationship with the Soviet Union had proved hollow.” This is when, according to Conboy and Morrison, the US President called the meeting already mentioned; it decided to increase US military assistance to India; also mentioned was the possibility of using the CIA's Tibetan guerrillas: “By meeting's end, it was decided that Harriman would lead a high-powered delegation to New Delhi to more fully assess India's needs. General Paul Adams, chief of the US Strike Command, was to head the military component. From the CIA, Des FitzGerald won a seat on the mission, as did the head of the Tibet Task Force, Ken Knaus.”

According to the US version: “without pause, Ambassador Galbraith ushered Harriman into the first of four meetings with Nehru. The end results of these discussions were plans for a major three-phase military aid package encompassing material support, help with domestic defense production, and possible assistance with air defenses.”

During their visit to Delhi, the CIA representatives held sessions with BN Mullik: “Both the CIA and the Intelligence Bureau were quick to seize the opportunity.” They came up with some schemes to counter China and despite the opposition from several quarters in the US Administration, on December 13, the Kennedy administration approved some training assistance to Uban's tactical guerrilla force.¹¹

¹¹ According to Conboy and Morrison: “On 20 November, Mullik had notified Nehru that he wanted to quit his post as director of the Intelligence Bureau in order to focus on organizing a resistance movement in the event the Chinese pushed further into Assam. Nehru refused to accept his spymaster's resignation and instead directed him towards [Biju] Patnaik [Chief Minister of Orissa], with the suggestion that they pool their talent.

Meeting later that same afternoon, the spy and the minister became quick allies. Although their resistance plans took on less urgency the next day, after Beijing announced a unilateral cease-fire, Patnaik offered critical help in other arenas. Later that month, when

A First Meeting

Ratuk Ngawang, one of the commanders¹² of the Tibetan force, consecrated one chapter of his memoirs¹³ to the first days of the SFF, we shall quote from his book in Tibetan. He recalled: "One day, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup had asked Andruk Zesak¹⁴ Gonpo Tashi¹⁵ to visit him at his residence in Darjeeling." Ratuk accompanied him: "In one of his messages, Gyalo Thondup mentioned that we should not believe that the military base in Lo Manthang¹⁶ has strong foundation."

Thondup explained that in a place where there were plenty of bamboos, the leaves which fall from the bamboo will move upwards when the wind blows

the CIA wanted to use its aircraft to quietly deliver three planeloads of supplies to India as a sign of good faith, it was Patnaik who arranged for the discreet use of the Charbatia airfield in Orissa. And in December, after the CIA notified New Delhi of its impending paramilitary support program, he was the one dispatched to Washington on behalf of Nehru and Mullik to negotiate details of the assistance package." Op. cit., page 180.

¹² Known in Tibetan as *Depon* or 'Dapön' (mDa' dpon), a commander of a regiment

¹³ *The Autobiography of Dasur Ratukk Ngawang of Lithang*, Lithang Historical Records, Vol 3 (Part II), (2008, Dharamsala, Amnye Machen Institute).

I am indebted to Passang Tsering for providing me a translation of the chapter related to the formation of the Special Frontier Forces.

¹⁴ Or Dszak, a title for the Third Rank Tibetan title.

¹⁵ Andruk Gampo Tashi established a people's army called *Chushi Gangdrug*, ('Four Rivers, Six Ranges'); 'chu' means 'water' or 'river' and 'chi' is 'four', while 'gang' is 'mountain' and druk is 'six'.

It is the name traditionally given to the Kham province where Salween, the Mekong, the Yangtse and the Yellow River flow from the Tibetan Plateau, passing between six parallel ranges of mountains (Duldza Zalmo, Tshawa, Markham, Pobar, Mardza, and Minya).

It was not a Tibetan government army, but rather a grassroot Pan-Tibetan army. Gampo Tashi was accepted as the undisputed leader of this resistance army.

¹⁶ The CIA funded, trained, armed guerilla movement based in Mustang, Northern Nepal. Lo Manthang was the capital of the small kingdom of Mustng.

upwards and downwards if the wind blows downwards: “there is no guarantee which side the leaves will go. His conclusion was that it was better to establish a large military academy in India.”

He then asked Gonpo Tashi’s opinion, the latter told Thondup that it would be an important military initiative which could make the Tibetan people more powerful.

When Gyalo Thondup asked the Khampa leader about his recruitment plans, Gampo Tashi said that a thousand or two thousand soldiers would not be of much benefit and that the objective should be to have as many soldiers as possible. The Dalai Lama’s brother answered that he would go ahead and speak with the IB (Intelligence Bureau) people to check if there was any possibility of finding support. Thondup told Gonpo Tashi that strict confidentiality should be maintained about the meeting.

It was suggested to go ahead and coordinate with Indian authorities; there would not be an issue with the recruitment from the Tibetan side. As the meeting ended with a mutual agreement, it was decided to proceed with the project.

Meeting the Chushi Gangdruk

It is then that Adruk¹⁷ and Ratuk called for a meeting of the *Chushi Gangdruk* to ask the opinion of the military commanders living in Kalimpong: would the Tibetans be interested to participate and how many were likely to join if a large military training academy was established somewhere in India. Jagoe Namgyal Dorjee and Sadu Lobsang Nyandak, two Khampa leaders agreed; they had no objection to establish a military training institution; they readily supported the idea.

It was decided to divide the *Chushi Gangdruk* leaders and depute them to go across India to the different Tibetans settlements to collect the names of

¹⁷ Adruk is sometimes spelt Adruk.

perspective soldiers: "Every participant agreed to this suggestion and started electing their representatives".

Ratuk Ngawang, Dhargon Taso Choezoe and Amdo Kathok were selected to collect the lists of possible recruits. Gonpo Tashi told Ratuk to first go to Dharamsala to seek an audience with the Dalai Lama and update the Tibetan leader about of the new situation. During the next few days, this was done: "We informed His Holiness about our travel plans to cover Dalhousie, Chamba area, Kullu, Upper and lower Shimla, Janakpur, Jalirung¹⁸ and Mussoorie to find candidates to start the new Tibetan military establishment. ...His Holiness the Dalai Lama advised us to include names of young men and women from all three regions and not to restrict amongst *Chushi Gandruk*¹⁹ and then filter and select those whom you feel are qualified."

He also said to the three representatives of the *Chushi Gangdruk* that their work would be smoother and easier, if they travelled with a recommendation letter from Kashag²⁰: "We followed His guidelines and approached the Kashag and received an official letter from Palha *Dronye Chenmo*²¹ and travelled to the above places to collect names," said Ratuk Ngawang. When they reached Mussoorie, Gyalo Thondup had already sent a message for Ratuk to Jigme Taring, the Principal of the Tibetan school: "Ratuk Ngawang should immediately proceed to Darjeeling. The work of collecting names should be left in the hands of two remaining members and they should join later."

Ratuk obeyed and immediately left; when he arrived in Darjeeling, he met Gyalo Thondup and Gonpo Tashi who asked for a report on the places visited so far: "I informed them about our visit to Dharamsala, the audience with

¹⁸ We have not been able to locate Jalirung.

¹⁹ The Dalai Lama meant not to recruit only Khampas.

²⁰ The Tibetan Cabinet.

²¹ Thubten Woeden Phala was the *Dronye Chenmo or Lord Chamberlain in Tibet*. He was now a minister.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Kashag's support letter," recalled Ratuk, who also brought a first list of volunteers' names.

Gyalo Thondup was happy with the work done and told the Khampa chieftain that he should go again to the places already visited to recruit soldiers.

Kundeling Thupten Gyaltzen, Kalsang, student of General Yeshe and elder son of Trengdong were to assist him: "You should go to Pathankot and make a phone call to Security Department in Dharamsala and inform them about your arrival and ask Security Commanding Officer to come to Pathankot. He will meet you there, you will discuss with them and you guide them where to start the recruitment."

The travel and daily allowance of the new recruits were to be paid according to the norms decided by Ratuk's team: "A small metal box full of hundred-rupee Indian notes, exact amount I don't recollect, was handed over to me with instruction to keep proper records of income and expenditure," noted Ratuk.

The officers did as ordered and went to Pathankot; the Commanding Officer of the Dharamsala Security Office was not available, but his deputy, Lobsang Yeshe came to meet them; he was keen to get guidance on how to collect the names of the required soldiers. He was told that there were about 1,000 monks from monasteries working on two separate road construction sites in Chamba Valley, some 800 of them should be able to join the force; then they could get about 400 out of about 600 *Chushi Gangdruk's* members living in Dalhousie.

On the Chamba road construction, many got suspicious and two of the leaders went to Dharamsala to meet the Minister of Home, Phalha *Donyer Chemo* and asked his advice about joining the military force. Phala said that he had no knowledge about the recruitment, but "it is up to individuals, we can't prevent anyone from joining or push anyone to go against his wish."

Fearing a misadventure like it had happened to the recruits to Mustang, only 72 volunteers signed up. The recruiters did not go to Dalhousie, but asked some of the leaders to send all the volunteers from Dalhousie to Pathankot. The officer in-charge of the Tibetan Handicraft Center and the settlement officer were told that no instructions had been received from the exiled Tibetan Government and it was an individual's decision. The recruiters informed those wanting to enroll that they should report to Ratuk Ngawang at Pathankot. Their travel fare and food expenses were to be fully covered: "everyone left saying, we had been waiting for such an opportunity when we can receive military training." Ultimately, they recruited more than 500 soldiers.

Incidentally, one of the buses had an accident and five or six recruits suffered minor injuries, but there was no loss of life.

Suddenly, the Dalhousie settlement officer informed the Kashag that the handicraft center was empty "because Ratuk Ngawang recruited everyone into military"; he wanted to know what should he do. Kashag insisted that the handicraft center should not be closed. Pathankot's branch of the Security Department then asked Ratuk to report immediately to Dharamsala.

None of the new recruits were interested to go back to Dalhousie, though Ratuk and his colleagues tried to explain that it was an order from the government that they should return to the handicraft center.

The Security Office in Dharamsala deputed Chamdo Jampa Kalden to Pathankot to tell Ratuk to send at least half of them back to the handicraft center: "We requested and appealed to them, but not a single soul changed their mind. ...Finding no resolution, we drafted a letter saying everyone should decide on their own [to join the Army] and Chamdo Jampa Kalden returned to Dharamsala."

Then, Ratuk send them off after disbursing their travel allowances.

The recruiters then moved to Kullu and Simla area to see if there were volunteers interested to join the force: "in total there were little more than 3,800 volunteers." Later, they visited Musoorie, Herbertpur, Jalirung²², Chhorpur²³ and gathered some 200 recruits more before returning to Darjeeling to present the accounts of all their expenditures: "When we reached, we were informed of the arrival of about 200 guerilla fighters in Darjeeling and 700 from Kalimpong, Gangtok and Darjeeling area." With the other representatives who visited other areas, there were already 6,000 recruits at the military camp.

Appointment of Leaders at 22 Establishment at Dehra Dun

Gyalo Thondup then asked Gonpo Tashi to send as many former military leaders from Chushi Gangdruk to the military school in Chakrata in Uttar Pradesh; 39 commanders and leaders were brought to Kalimpong, where they were briefed about the requirements for Chakrata. Ratukk addressed the gathering and told them that they initially required three or four leaders. Some decisions had to be taken, as more than 6,000 volunteers had started their training under some Tibetan-speaking Indian intelligence officers and there was no Tibetan to train them and lead them: "Those of us who are capable to lead the soldiers should take the role sooner or later, but we must decide as a priority those who can leave immediately to lead the force at Chakrata."

The two-day meeting unanimously appointed Ratuk Ngawang and Gyalo Thondup as the first two leaders: "I told the [people assembled] that I would go to train the soldiers rather than to administer a military establishment, since I don't know Hindi and I can't work with the Indian officers," wrote Ratuk who gave the example of General Yeshe, who had been sent to

²² See footnote 16.

²³ In Haryana.

command the Mustang guerilla, but who was later criticized; he had won the trust of the troops of Batang, Lithang and Gyalrong, but other factions did not trust him and this created serious problems amongst the troops.

Those who had gathered in Kalimpong had had some experience in military leadership, Ratuk observed: "It is impossible to wage war without discipline, right now; I am praised [by you] and chosen as the most suitable man, but there is no guarantee that [in the future] accusations [like in the case of General Yeshi] will not [arise]." He said that therefore he couldn't accept their decision that he should lead the Force.

However, the leaders insisted again, it was a special situation and there was an urgency; they said that Ratuk should accept, as he was the most qualified leader, "you have no wife and children and there is no binding force to stop you from going. We will follow you and Gyalo Thondup after six months. We stand by all the decisions you make to prepare a military force." Ratuk requested each of the commanding officers to give this in writing and sign it: "I felt it would be inappropriate for me not to accept their request to lead the force." The key points were agreed and signed by the 39 commanding officers.

After the meeting, Ratuk left for Darjeeling, where he packed his belongings before proceeding to Chakrata; it was March 1, 1963.²⁴

Two Tibetan officers, Gya Thondup and Tenpa Rabgey were posted in Dehra Dun to receive and dispatch the new recruits to Chakrata in Uttar Pradesh. Thondup who had earlier been directed to go to Chakrata to lead the force, reached the camp on March 16, 1963, while Tsedrung Jampa Wangdue and Chamdo Jampa Kalden arrived from Dharamsala on March 20.

The CIA Involvement

²⁴ As per the record, Ratuk's date of joining the Force is March 6, 1963.

By mid-April 1963, eight CIA agents assembled in New Delhi: "the team members spent their first days agreeing on a syllabus for the upcoming six months. One week later, their supplies arrived and six of the advisers left Sanford²⁵ in New Delhi for the chilled air of Chakrata²⁶. The last member, Thompson, alone went to Agra."

In Chakrata, the CIA advisers were given a tour of the training site by Brig Uban: "A ridgeline ran east to west, with Chakrata occupying a saddle in the middle. Centered in the saddle was a polo field that fell off sharply to the south for 600 meters, then less sharply for another 300 meters. North of the field was a scattering of stone houses and shops, all remnants of the colonial era and now home to a handful of hill tribesmen who populated the village." The description continued: "East of the saddle was a series of stone barracks built by the British a century earlier and more recently used by the two Gurkha regiments. These were now holding the Tibetan recruits. There was also a longer stone building once used as a hospital, a firing range, and a walled cemetery overgrown by cedar."

This was the setting for the headquarters of the new Force.

Visit of Gyalo Thondup to the Establishment 22

On March 25, 1963, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother and the Indian Inspector General of the Force, Brig Sujjan Singh Uban and five officers from the Indian intelligence visited Chakrata to introduce themselves.

²⁵ A marine colonel, Sanford was in London when the Chinese attack took place; a few months later, when the CIA received an approval to send eight advisers to Chakrata, Sanford was selected to oversee the operations.

²⁶ Sanford stayed in his office at the US embassy in New Delhi, working under the official designation of Special Assistant to Ambassador Galbraith: "As this would be an overt posting with the full knowledge of the Indian government, both he and the seven other paramilitary advisers would remain segregated from David Blee's CIA station."

An elaborate meal was served at the officer's mess and Gyalo Thondup introduced the four Tibetan leaders to Brig Uban; by that time, Jampa Wangdue and Jampa Kalden had been deputed by the Security Department in Dharamsala.

Ratuk remembered in his memoirs: "They were older and not so experienced in military warfare and therefore their responsibility was to coordinate between the Tibetan soldiers and local Indian population to avoid any problem as well as to teach Buddhist Philosophy and Culture to the soldiers so that they maintain a sound moral and ethical living."

Ratuk Ngawang and Gya Thondup were guerrilla leaders and their role was to instruct the troops in guerrilla warfare; both had been *Chushi Gandruk* leaders and they had been through guerrilla encounters against the Chinese military in Tibet.

Brig Uban wanted to know from Gyalo Thondup to what the Tibetan rank of '*mak chi*' or 'Political Leader' corresponded? The Dalai Lama's brother explained that '*mak chi*' according to Tibetan government's military is same as '*dapon*': it may correspond to a brigadier²⁷ in the Indian Army. Ratuk clarified that guerrilla warriors "do not have uniform and hence no military labels are allowed and therefore they will be known as Political Leader."

On the next day, at the site of the military training ground, Gyalo Thondup gave a talk in the presence of Brig Uban, the five Indian intelligence officers, some Indian officers (a brigadier, a colonel, a major, a captain), the Tibetan Leaders, other instructors and the 6,000 Tibetan *jawans*.

He expressed his gratitude to the Indian intelligence officers who made it possible to conduct a secret guerrilla training for the cause of Tibet. The training, uniforms, arms and ammunition, food and salary for 10,000 to

²⁷ It is difficult to assign an equivalence, because SS Uban, the Inspector General commanding the Force was himself a brigadier. The *Dapon* could not have the same rank as that of the commander.

20,000 thousand fighters would be provided for, he said: "We all should train hard with dedication to wage a guerrilla war in about six months inside Tibet. We must maintain unity and respect amongst us as well as with the Indian soldiers and civilian population."

Thondup noted that leading the officers was a 'Sadarji' (Brig SS Uban), "a highly experienced retired Indian military Brigadier. He respects His Holiness the Dalai Lama and is moreover great supporter of Tibetan cause and he has volunteered to lead us."

Thondup continued to praise the 'Sardarji', he was highly educated, a martyr and an accomplished officer in military warfare; as the five Indian intelligence officers could speak Tibetan language, they would translate and provide help to the instructors.

He welcomed the four Tibetan senior officials, particularly Jampa Wangdue and Jampa Kalden, who had come all the way from Dharamsala: "Their main responsibility is to teach moral ethics, Buddhism and culture and maintain unity amongst Tibetan soldiers, as well as Indian military and civilian population."

Thondup continued: "Ratuk Ngawang and Gya Thondup had experiences of leading Voluntary Guardian Tibetan military leadership²⁸ against the Chinese aggression." They had been appointed with the blessings of Gonpo Tashi and the top leaders of the *Chushi Gandruk*.

The Dalai Lama's brother also suggested that leaders from the three provinces should later be appointed, based on their experience and qualification; he observed: "Those of you present here today who were commanders and captains in the Tibetan military will in future serve in leadership position and likewise there will be continuous recruitment of voluntary soldiers. ...We will be able to launch guerrilla attack inside Tibet

²⁸ *Tensung danglang makgar*.

after six months of military training. Everyone must work hard," concluded Gyalo Thondup.

General Uban said that Gyalo Thondup had covered every aspect in his speech; only a name was required for the military establishment. It would be called Special Frontier Force and 22 would be its number: "This establishment will be recognized to be a special Tibetan military establishment and hence no Indians will be recruited."

Thondup concluded by saying "Victory to the Dalai Lama, Victory to Tibet, Victory to India."

Training at the Establishment 22

The first guerrilla military training was conducted by one Col Venkat and one Col Joshi. An Indian Intelligence officer, Shukla taught the tactics of guerrilla warfare; he explained the nature of guerrilla warfare and how a martyr sacrificing his life for his nation was important while implementing guerrilla tactics; he also mentioned the role of a warrior and that a guerrilla fighter should see himself as "a fish in the sea on the location of guerrilla warriors. If the sea is sick, then naturally the fish dwelling in this sea will become sick. Food and water are very essential for the survival of the guerrilla warrior, the place must grow eatable mushrooms and greeneries in summer and educated on eating. Eatable worms are scarce during the winter, spring and fall seasons and importance of knowing techniques to kill wild animals silently with weapons, suffocation, setting trap, sharpening of weapons, killing in a pit, killing with stone are different methods taught."

He gave the names of different edible fruits.

Ratuk recalled that the main objective of guerilla fighter was "to defeat the enemy and maintain cordial relationship with local population and instigate provocation or misunderstanding amongst the enemy and spread the propaganda."

The training in guerrilla warfare involved making small dynamite *'dro bombs'*²⁹ and the use of grenades were taught; *'dro bomb'* was primarily used to blow bridges over rivers or destroying roads during a war. The hand grenades had to be used in the presence of large number of enemies, in situations, when you don't have *'dro bomb'*. The description continued: "A light and short rifle called assault rifle with about 25 cartridges, a good quality rifle we have never seen earlier and it was talked to be the weapon made for the third world war and not meant for now, likewise short gun Chanata, Ting gun, and heavy weapons including cannon, rocket launchers were explained, so was the use of semi-automatic sniper rifles and including Chinese weapons like Bura and Bura chigang, machine gun, Heliudan hand grenade was taught."

The training had taken a serious turn.

The Commando Training

Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison recalled: "Once fully settled, the CIA team was introduced to its guerrilla students."

In reviewing Establishment 22, the Americans were immediately struck by the age of the Tibetans. Although there was a sprinkling of younger recruits, nearly half were older than forty-five; some were even approaching sixty. Jamba Kalden, the Chief Political Leader, was practically a 'child' at forty-three. As had happened with the Mustang guerrillas, the older generation, itching for a final swing at the Chinese, had used its seniority to edge out younger candidates during the recruitment drive in the refugee camps.

When they were informed that the training would include para-jumping, the Tibetans were extremely enthusiastic, however the US authors explained:

²⁹ Probably, a 'drogue bomb', this home-made weapon is an anti-vehicle grenade consisting of about 230 gm of explosive packed into a big baked bean tin attached to a throwing handle. It was used by the IRA in the 1980s.

“There was a major problem, however. Establishment 22 remained a secret not only from the general Indian public, but also from the bulk of the Indian military. The only airborne training facilities in India were at Agra, where the CIA's TJ Thompson was discreetly training a dozen Tibetan riggers. Because the Agra school ran jump training for the Indian army's airborne brigade, Thompson had been forced to keep the twelve well concealed. But doing the same for thousands of Tibetans would be impossible; unless careful steps were taken, the project could be exposed.”

According to Ratuk, the fighters started to train to be able to para-jump into the enemy territory; between July 25, 1963 and April 25, 1964 a total of 132 jumps were completed under the jumpmaster in Agra³⁰, Sarsawar³¹, Dum Dum (West Bengal) and high altitude areas such as Ladakh. Ratuk remembered that his jumpmasters were “Mr. Job and Mr. Harry from America” and Major Narain from India.”

They had to learn to jump into enemy lines with a full set of accessories such as wireless and radio set; the use of maps and compasses was taught: “We were also trained to send signals to our airplane, while in enemy territory with fire, smoke, torch etc. The training also included burying of ammunition, machines, food and clothes and to mark and map it so that someone else (can) benefit in future.”

They were shown not only how to measure distances and transfer the direction on the ground without making mistake, but also to swim across rivers, climb rocky cliffs at altitudes from 1500 to 3000 meters: “a brief description of entire military training was introduced.”

The US authors mentioned that the CIA advisers reviewed what the Indian staff had accomplished over the previous few months: “Uban had initially

³⁰ The soldiers of Establishment 22 were given a cover and called the 12 GR or ‘12th Gorkha Rifles’ during the duration of their stay at Agra.

³¹ Sarsawa is a town at the border of Haryana, in Saharanpur district (Uttar Pradesh). Sarsawa has been intimately linked with the SFF.

focused his efforts on instilling a modicum of discipline, which he feared might be an impossible task. To his relief, this fear proved unfounded. The Tibetans immediately controlled their propensity for drinking and gambling at his behest; the brigadier encouraged dancing and chanting, as preferable substitutes to fill their leisure time."

The Indians instructors had also begun a strict regimen of physical exercises, including extended marches across the nearby hills. Because the weather varied widely - snow blanketed the northern slopes, while spring sun was starting to bake the south - special care was taken to avoid pneumonia. In addition to the exercises, the Indians had offered a sampling of tactical instructions. But most of it, the CIA team found, reflected a conventional mind-set. "We had to un-teach them quite a bit," said one of the trainers. This combination - strict exercise and a crash course in guerrilla tactics - continued through the first week of May 1963. At that point, classes were put on temporary hold in order to initiate airborne training.

VIPs and Tibetan Military Leaders visit Establishment 22

On September 13, 1963, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Establishment 22; he was accompanied by the Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup. The four Tibetan leaders presented a letter to the Prime Minister asking the Government to consider sending the Force into Tibet at the earliest.

In their *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*, Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison gave their own version of the visit of the Prime Minister's visit ...and a different date: "Nehru was receiving regular updates on the progress at Chakrata. During autumn, with the deployment of the eight-man CIA team almost finished, he was invited to make an inspection visit to the hill camp. The Intelligence Bureau also passed a request asking the Prime Minister to use the opportunity to address the guerrillas directly. Nehru was

sympathetic, but cautious. The thought of the Prime Minister addressing Tibetan combatants on Indian soil had the makings of a diplomatic disaster, if word leaked. Afraid of adverse publicity, he agreed to visit the camp, but refused to give a speech.”

The narrative of the US authors continued, Uban had the men of Establishment 22 undergo a fast lesson in parade drill: “The effort paid off. Though stiff and formal when he arrived on November 14³², Nehru was visibly moved when he saw the Tibetans in formation. And knowing that the prime minister was soft for roses, Uban presented him with a brilliant red blossom plucked from a garden he had planted on the side of his stone bungalow. Nehru buckled.” The Prime Minister asked for a microphone, and he spoke to the guerrillas. He said that India backed them, “and vowed they would one day return to an independent country.”

It is difficult to say if it is a true account.

To come back to Ratuk’s story, on August 15, 1964, Chakrata received the visit of Lt Gen³³ FSHJ ‘Sam’ Manekshaw, the then General Officer Commander-in-Chief of Western Command; after inspecting the installations, the four Tibetan Leaders also requested the General to consider sending the guerrilla fighters into Tibet at the earliest.

The Director of the Intelligence Bureau, BM Mullick and other intelligence officers such as AT Khatore, Hassan, Narain Singh also visited the Establishment.

The Tibetan ‘Leaders’ of Establishment 22 were Tsedung Jampa Wangdue, Jampa Kalden, Ratuk Ngawang, Dorjee Thondup; intelligence unit in-charge, Andruk, secretary Dayab Loten, security officer Thondup Gyal and Trengdong.

The number of Leaders was eventually increased in 1964/65.

³² November 14 is Jawaharlal Nehru’s birthday.

³³ Later Field Marshal.

Jampa Wangdue was the first of the original group to retire on April 19, 1964; later, Rupon³⁴ Sonam Tashi retired on November 3, 1967; all others remained in service: "Nevertheless, India and China became friends before this guerilla troops could wage war against People's Liberation Army in six months as hoped earlier and our soldiers were sent to patrol Indian border territory in regiments from Upper Ladakh to Assam," wrote Ratuk. While patrolling the borders, they received strict instructions from the Government of India not to cross over and pick up fights with the Chinese.

A Visit to Dharamsala

In 1963, once the foundation for Establishment 22 was laid, Tsedung Jampa Wangdue and Ratuk paid a visit to Dharamsala to brief the Dalai Lama; further, the *jawans* wanted a 'protection cord' from their religious leader. From Saharanpur, they boarded a train to Pathankot and proceeded by road to Dharamsala; Ratuk recalled: "The next day we got an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and presented him with entire report and my colleague requested protection cords for the soldiers."

Before returning to Chakrata, they had another audience with the Dalai Lama who said "we will think how to prepare the protection cords."

As they were leaving, the Dalai Lama asked Jampa Wangdu, who had been a monk earlier, why he had grown his hair. Jampa answered that he was not allowed to shave his hair in the military; the Dalai Lama retorted that many Indian soldiers have shaved their head: "Now be careful," said the Tibetan Leader.

Ratuk commented that he was surprised that the Dalai Lama seemed to know many things; he also aware about the issues faced in Dalhousie, "I requested the permission to clarify a little bit. When we were recruiting

³⁴ Group leader.

soldiers for Establishment 22, the handicraft center had to close down because close to 600 people from there, joined the military."

At that time, Gyalo Thondup had sent Ratuk to recruit more soldiers; the latter was accused of 'emptying' the handicraft center in Dhalousie; Ratuk said it was hurting, though he had done this for a larger cause, Gyalo Thondup himself was working very hard to establish the military unit. He narrated the circumstances to the Dalai Lama: "I was fortunate to present before His Holiness the Dalai Lama about the entire issue and His Holiness seemed satisfied and contented," wrote Ratuk, who added: "When we were outside His Holiness the Dalai Lama's palace, I told my colleague that His Holiness knew about it and he laughed."

Later the two officers returned to Establishment 22.

Adruk Gonpo Tashi had come back from England, where he had gone for a medical checkup³⁵; as he had been admitted in a hospital in Kolkata, Ratuk went to meet and brief him about the progress of the military training center; Gonpo Tashi was satisfied: "He showed me many clips of bullets and traces of gun powder [on his body] and expressed that he felt a little better now and plans to spend few days in Calcutta before going back to Darjeeling."

The guerilla leader suggested that the Establishment should be properly trained in discipline: "I did not elaborate about the six months training" but he said that after completing the six months, they had planned to go and fight the Chinese inside Tibet. Gonpo Tashi retorted that though the exact date when they will be able to do so, was not known, it would certainly come one day.

During those days, the guerillas based in Mustang (Nepal) were "combating well against Chinese military in Western Tibet," the Khampa chieftain added:

³⁵ Gonpo Tashi had been severely wounded during the operations in Tibet; it was more than a medical check-up.

“I think our soldiers in Mustang can coordinate with these soldiers in Western Tibet and slowly you can continue to coordinate with them, it would be nice.”

At that time, Gonpo Tashi needed the assistance of a walking stick and required help to walk to the restroom as his wound had not fully healed from his operation. He was then assisted by a translator and a servant. Later on, Amdo Lekshey who could speak Hindi, stayed with him at the Kolkata hospital.

During his stay, Ratuk met a security official called Amdo Rinchen. He had bought about 200 Western watches to sell and wanted to join Ratuk till Dehra Dun. As they were approaching the railway station, they were stopped by police who wanted to check Rinchen’s bag. Ratuk remembered an identity card issued by the Indian intelligence agency; they () immediately let us off, “otherwise he could land up in prison and lose everything for illegal trading charges,” he recalled.

Return to Chakrata

When they reached Dehra Dun, Jampa Wangdu had already arrived; they reported about the discussion with the Dalai Lama. Two weeks later, when Amdruk Gonpo Tashi returned to Darjeeling, Ratuk went there to visit him again and found that his health was improving; after two or three days, Ratuk returned to Chakrata.

Finally in 1964, the protection chords from Dharamsala were ready; a Tibetan lama Ratoe Chuwar Rinpoche was invited to Establishment 22 to give a long life initiation to the soldiers and explain to them about the protection chord: “A pill with the protection chord was made³⁶ and should be used only at the time of the death.” The Rinpoche returned to Dharamsala soon after.

³⁶ Phozey in Tibetan.

On April 19, 1964 Tsedung Jampa Wangdue retired from service, having been a little more than a year in Chakrata; he later returned to Dharamsala to serve as the Secretary of the Security Office.

Ratuk used to discuss the accounts related to Establishment 22 with Jampa Kalden. During one of his visits to Dharamsala, Ratuk met Surkhang Wangdue Dorjee, a minister who told him that he had been appointed Minister of Security, but Gyalo Thondup had not shared his contacts with him: "It could be that he did not share this because he had a genuine problem," thought Ratuk. But later, Gyalo Thondup said he handed over everything that was available with him; he also provided explanations for it.

The Participation in the 1971 War

It is interesting to note that the Tibetan force participated in the Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. Under the cover of the Mukti Bahini, the Tibetans infiltrated East Pakistan³⁷ a few weeks before the beginning of the war. They conducted raids to destroy bridges and communication lines deep inside Pakistan's eastern province. The operation was so secret that most Generals of the Indian Army's Eastern Command in Calcutta did not know about the activities of 3,000 Tibetan *jawans* commanded by two Tibetan *Dapons*. Though Maj Gen SS Uban³⁸, designated as Inspector General of the SFF, wrote his memoir *The Phantoms of Chittagong*, he only obliquely refers to his troops as Tibetans.

Ratuk Ngawang recalled in an interview with the author: "The Force was established in 1962, after the Indo-China War. The main objective of the regiment was to fight the Chinese army with the help of the Indian Army. The plan was to engage the Chinese army in a military conflict within five or six months of the Force's creation. But the Indo-China war came to an

³⁷ Soon to be Bangladesh.

³⁸ Brig Uban had been promoted to a major general by then.

abrupt end (on November 22), and due to severe international pressure to maintain peace, no further military engagements occurred with China. Therefore, the services of Establishment 22 regiment were not used as planned."

When asked who ordered the SFF to take part in the 1971 war, Ratuk Ngawang answered: "A special army meeting was held in New Delhi³⁹; later we heard that General Uban had volunteered to lead the Establishment 22 regiment in the Bangladesh war. It was Uban and my colleague Dapon Jampa Kalden who voluntarily decided to take part in the war."

Ratuk Ngawang added: "When the regiment was established, there was a mutual agreement that we would fight the Chinese. This did not happen. However, I told General Uban and Jampa Kalden that if we were to get a formal order from the Indian government, then we could join the operations." They did.

The website *Bharat Rakshak* provides more information on the SFF's achievements in Bangladesh: "After three weeks of border fighting, the SFF divided its six battalions into three columns and moved into East Pakistan on 3 December 1971."

By the time Pakistan surrendered, the SFF had lost 56 men, nearly 190 were wounded, but it is said that they blocked a potential escape route for East Pakistani forces into Burma and would have halted Pakistan's 97 Independent Brigade in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

As they did not 'exist' officially for the Government of India, nobody could be decorated. However, some brave Tibetan commandos were awarded cash prizes by the Indian Government.

It is also necessary to mention some of the many operations in which the SFF participated: An attempt to plant a nuclear-powered sensor on the

³⁹ Probably under RN Kao, the Research & Analysis (RAW) Chief.

Nanda Devi in 1965, a regular presence on the Siachen Glacier or in the Turtuk sector during the Kargil conflict.

Though the SFF have in some cases been replaced by the Ladakh Scouts and other local troops who can also acclimatise easily for high altitude warfare, they remain ready to fight to defend India's frontiers.

To end, we shall quote a poem written in Hindi by a Tibetan SFF jawan who had participated in the Kargil operations; the song of the poet-jawan described joy, sorrow and emotion by expressing his gratitude to his second motherland and to the people of India who had given refuge, protection and education to his countrymen.

It is difficult to say today what is the future of the 22s, but one can at least acknowledge that they fought well in a war which was not theirs and if the new leadership of China were to choose adventurism as its new policy and walk in the footsteps of Mao, one can be certain that the 22 would be there to defend India and their own lost motherland, repaying the debt to the Indian Government for having looked after the Tibetans after the events of March 1959.