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WIND

between the

WORLDS

by ROBERT FORD

DAVID MCKAY COMPANY, INC.

New York

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Author's Note

I have changed a few names and circumstantial details to avoid the possibility of further persecutions as a result of this book.

R. F.

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PART I
THE THREAT

1

The Red Peril

THE CHINESE WERE COMING. I HAD JUST HEARD THEM SAY SO.

"The tasks for the People's Liberation Army for 1950," announced Radio Peking, "are to liberate Taiwan [Formosa], Hainan, and Tibet."

I switched off the radio and told my boy Tenné to saddle my pony. Suddenly I felt a foreigner and alone.

"What is the news, Phodo Kusho?" asked Lobsang, one of the two clerks attached to the radio station.

I told him.

"You and Tashi had better think about sending your wives and children back to Lhasa," I added as I went out. "The frontier's less than a hundred miles away. If anyone wants me I've gone to see the Governor General."

The Germans had been less than a hundred miles away when I heard them say they were going to invade England in 1940, but it had been easy to deride Lord Haw-Haw in a packed N.A.A.F.I. at Cranwell. Now, as the only European in eastern Tibet, I could not raise even a wry smile at that anonymous voice from Peking. It separated me from all the people of Tibet. I had always laughed when the newspapers

called me the loneliest Briton in the world, but this made me feel I was. For I was not down on the list for liberation; the Tibetans were to be liberated from me.

It was the first of January and bitterly cold, and I drew my fur-lined blue silk robe closer as I mounted my pony. Téné rode in front and set the pace, which was slow. Haste would have been undignified for a Tibetan government official whatever his mission, and in any case the rough track that passed for the main street of Chamdo was heavily iced. I had become a careful rider since I put myself so far beyond the reach of medical aid that a broken leg would mean death or at least deformity for life.

Some women were shopping at the stalls; others churned butter tea in front of their wattle-and-daub houses. Children kicked a shuttlecock in the Chinese style. Claret-robed monks walked along telling their beads and murmuring prayers. Old Smiler, the beggar, turned his prayer wheel and stuck out his tongue, paying me the Tibetan's highest mark of respect. Two men and a woman in sheepskins proceeded painfully along the icy street in a series of full-length prostrations. They would reach Lhasa in six months if they were lucky, and had a fifty-fifty chance of dying on the way. But they could be sure of rebirth in a higher station next time.

Slowly as we rode, it took us less than five minutes to go through this, the principal town of Kham, the eastern province of Tibet.

The Ngom Chu River, flanking Chamdo on the west, was frozen hard, and heavily laden yaks were being driven across the ice. We used the old wooden cantilever bridge, which still had doors as a reminder of the last time the town was besieged. For comfort I took a second glance at the bullet marks on them, which had been made when the Tibetans last took up arms. They won that fight and drove the Chinese

out, and the bullet marks were only thirty-two years old.

We rode up the river for a few minutes, and then across a small plain to the Governor General's Residency. It was a new building made of rammed earth, freshly whitewashed and looking bright and clean. Two eighty-foot poles supported huge prayer flags on either side of the gateway, and the wind turned a prayer wheel on the flat roof. Tenné dismounted and led my pony in. Mounted sentries presented arms, and a servant ran across the courtyard to help me at the dismounting stone. Mastiffs snarled and strained at their chains. The steward came out and bowed, and led me upstairs.

Lhalu Shapé, Governor General of Kham and one of the four Cabinet Ministers who were the chief rulers of Tibet, rose from his cushion as I entered his private room and bowed. He was wearing a bright yellow robe with a red sash. His plaited hair was tied in a double topknot with a golden amulet or charm box in the middle, and a long gold-and-turquoise earring dangled from his left ear. On one of his fingers glittered a diamond ring which he wore on the advice of his personal physician to protect his health. He walked across and shook hands.

Butter tea was served, and as I blew off the scum I made the usual polite remarks. But Lhalu could see I was impatient to tell him why I had come.

"There is news?" he asked.

I told him the news. It was not a complete surprise to either of us, for there had been vague threats from Peking before. But this was chillingly definite.

Lhalu picked up his rosary and began to tell his beads. "They will not come yet," he said.

I agreed. They could not invade Tibet yet, for they were still five hundred miles from the frontier. It was not much more than a month since Chungking had fallen and Chiang

Kai-shek fled to Formosa. Between Chungking and us lay the Chinese province of Sikang, deep gorge country with a Tibetan population and no through road. The Chinese province of Tsinghai in the north, where the reigning Dalai Lama had been found, presented similar obstacles, and we were safe at least until the spring. What worried me was whether we should be still as defenseless then as we were now.

"More troops will be sent from Lhasa," said Lhalu. "And modern arms. We shall not let the Chinese cross the river."

The river was the Upper Yangtze, the *de facto* boundary between Sikang and Tibet. I had been told it was difficult to cross, but it was a long line to defend.

"Phodo," said Lhalu, "when does your contract expire?"

"At the end of the third month, Your Excellency."

The third month of the Tibetan calendar ended in the middle of May. My contract with the Tibetan government dated from my arrival at Bombay in 1948 and was for two years. It was renewable at mutual option.

"Do you think you will want to renew it?" Lhalu asked.

I hesitated. According to Tibetan etiquette the initiative would have to come from me, but I was not going to ask for a further engagement in the present circumstances unless I knew my services were needed.

Lhalu understood.

"We hope you will want to stay," he said. "You know how much we appreciate what you have done in bringing radio to Chamdo. Before you came it took at least ten days for an official dispatch to reach Lhasa even by the fastest courier. Now it takes no time at all. As you know, we did not think of defense when we first offered you this appointment, but I do not need to tell you why it is so important for us to keep this radio link. If you leave it will break down."

I knew that was true. I was training four young Indians as wireless operators and mechanics, but they would not be ready to take full charge of the station by May. Nor was the government likely to find a suitable relief.

"I don't have to decide yet, do I?" I asked.

"I am not asking you officially, Phodo. I only want to know myself."

"I have been very happy here," I said. "Even if I knew your language better I would not be able to tell you how happy I have been. I want to stay. But I can do so only while Tibet remains independent. I would not work for a Communist government even if they wanted me to, which is not very likely."

"You must ask Shiwala Rimpoche if you want to know the future," said Lhalu with a smile, referring to the incarnate lama who lived just outside Chamdo. "But our spirit of independence is strong. We are not frightened of the Chinese. Did we not show that when we threw their officials out last year?"

Tibet had expelled all Chinese officials from the country the previous July, to assert her independence and neutrality in the Civil War. But the war was nearly over then, and the Chungking government could do no more than protest.

"They were representatives of the Kuomintang," I pointed out.

"The Communists are even worse. They have no gods, and they would destroy our religion. We shall never let them in."

"They have a better army than the Kuomintang," I pointed out, "and there is nothing more in China for their army to do. And I have heard rumors," I went on, choosing my words carefully, "of secret negotiations between Lhasa and Peking. I do not believe these rumors, but it seems at least possible

that the Tibetan government will seek a peaceful settlement. Whatever the terms might be, I have no doubt what it would mean in the end."

"The Chinese never keep their word," nodded Lhalu.

"The Communists are more dangerous than all previous Chinese governments," I said. "And if Tibet falls into their hands it will be very serious for me. I have heard several times from Radio Peking that Tibet is controlled by American and British imperialists."

"What nonsense!"

"Yes, and that is why it worries me. If the Chinese succeed in liberating Tibet, as they put it, they will want to find some evidence of foreign imperialism when they arrive. Your Excellency knows how many Americans there are in Tibet."

"There are none."

"And Britons?"

"Only you and Reginald Fox, the radio officer in Lhasa. Two."

"Three including Mr. Hugh Richardson at the Indian Mission, although he will hand over to an Indian soon. He and Fox are relatively safe in Lhasa. I am the only foreign imperialist in danger of falling into Communist hands. If I renew my contract it must be binding only so long as Tibet remains independent. And if Tibet gives in without fighting I want to be told before the agreement comes into force. I want enough time to get out of the country before the Communists come in."

"I assure you that you will have it, Phodo," said Lhalu emphatically. "I will personally guarantee your safe passage to Lhasa and out of the country."

"Thank you, Your Excellency."

"But," he added slowly, "I do not think it will come to that. We shall try to avert a war, but we have fought the Chinese

before, and if we must we shall fight them again." He paused. "If there is fighting will you stay?"

"If I am still under contract of course I shall stay. But only so long as Tibet resists."

Lhalu smiled.

"At least I can promise you one thing," he said. "There will be no local surrender in Kham so long as I am here."

I was sure that was true. Pro-Chinese Tibetans had put out his father's eyes for witchcraft, and would do the same to Lhalu if they had the chance.

Outside the Residency there was still ice in the shade, but the sun was pleasantly warm. It could burn, too, for in the clear atmosphere of 10,500 feet the ultra-violet rays are strong. The sky was blue, and I could see the great snow-clad peaks, rising to 18,000 feet, many miles away. Nearer Chamdo the hills were bare and eroded, and only a few clumps of firs had escaped deforestation. There were prayer flags and cairns of stones on the summits, and a thin plume of incense smoke rose from one. This peaceful valley in the high mountains could have been the original of Shangri-la, for there was little in it to remind me of the world I had left behind.

Along the river wound the track to Lhasa, five hundred miles to the west: the Holy City, the Forbidden City, the City of Mystery, but to me then a sophisticated city where you could drink cocktails and dance the samba, play tennis and bridge and read newspapers only three weeks old. The rough, narrow track leading to it was our life line—and if there was an attack from the north it was perilously easy to cut.

Some building was going on in the Residency grounds, and I saw a Tibetan Army officer watching some soldiers dressing

timber. He might have been a British officer by his uniform, complete with Sam Browne; but there was a charm box under his topee, and from his left ear dangled the five-inch earring that was compulsory for all government officials except Fox and me. He saw me and came across.

"What's the news?" he asked, as every official did, every time we met.

I told him the news. It concerned him deeply, for he was Dimön Depön, the officer commanding the Chamdo garrison, directly responsible to Lhalu Shapé, Commander in Chief of all forces in Kham.

Depön is usually translated as general, because it is the highest rank in the Tibetan Army. As that seems too grandiose some English writers have reduced him to colonel, but this also is misleading. The word simply means an officer commanding five hundred men, the largest formation in the Tibetan Army.

There were no badges or rank, so Dimön Depön wore symbolical *dorje* (thunderbolt) emblems on his shoulders instead of pips and crowns. He also wore a fine array of British campaign ribbons, including both the Mons Star and the Africa Star. No Tibetan ribbons had been issued yet, but it looked as if that time might be coming.

"We can beat the Chinese," he said confidently. "Come and look at the troops."

They were exercising on the plain in front of the Residency, forming fours, and from the front they looked like the Gurkhas I had seen in India. They were in the old-style British service dress, but their long single pigtails, braided with red thread, gave them away when they turned round. They also wore earrings—the infallible safeguard against being reincarnated as a donkey—but a much cheaper sort than those worn by Lhalu and Dimön.

The Anglo-Indian influence had come into the Tibetan Army in the nineteen-twenties, when selected instructors were trained by British and Indian officers in western Tibet. Tibetan has no military vocabulary, and the words of command were given in English; and so they were handed down. It was a purely oral tradition, and now they were hardly recognizable, but it was almost eerie to stand in Chamdo and hear orders like "Open order—march!"

Dimön Depön ordered battle practice, and the troops went through the motions of firing their rifles.

"We shall do target practice when we get some more ammunition," he told me. "At present there is not enough to spare. We must save it for the Chinese!"

He was no coward, but he was not a soldier either. He had not been a *depön* for long, and he had no previous military experience. That was normal. The rank of *depön* was just another steppingstone in the Tibetan hierarchy, and was reserved exclusively for members of the two hundred noble families that constituted the Tibetan official class. As I had been told that my own rank was not honorary, I might be promoted to *depön* myself one day. Lhalu had once been a *depön* in the Royal Bodyguard.

The senior professional officers were the *rupöns*, who were next to the *depöns* in military seniority but in the official hierarchy came nowhere at all. They were lowly officials without hope of advancement who had made the Army their career. There were two *rupöns* under a *depön*, each having charge of two hundred and fifty men. Dimön's *rupöns* were both able and conscientious, and worked hard on training the troops when he was not using them as builders.

Dimön Depön was an excellent architect. The Khambas, as the people of Kham are called, are poor builders, and it was normal to use troops for this work. Dimön had designed

the Residency, and the Army had built it. He wanted to build me a new radio station in the Residency grounds.

"Soon we must choose a site and have it tested by the monks for devils," he said. "Did you discuss it with the Governor General?"

"No," I said, "we were talking about the Chinese."

It was absurd to stay in Chamdo and stake my future on this musical-comedy army and a lot of prayer flags. The town had a garrison of five hundred men, and there were another two hundred and fifty in Lhalu's bodyguard. There were not many more than that guarding the whole of the Upper Yangtze. Their heavy arms were four Lewis guns and three pieces of mountain artillery, which were fired once a year to amuse the people. When bullets were precious one could not expect them to waste a shell just for practice. And this was the headquarters of Tibet's Eastern Command! Lhalu had said reinforcements would come from Lhasa, and I knew they had Bren and Sten guns there; but the normal strength of the Tibetan Army was only ten thousand, and what could they do against Communist China?

It was true that the troops were as tough as nails, incredibly brave, well disciplined, and fanatically loyal to their God-King. It was also true that the country was a military paradise for defense. It was useless for tanks or armored cars or motor transport of any kind; for there were no wheeled vehicles in Tibet, not even animal-drawn carts, and therefore there were no made roads. Bomber aircraft would not be of much use to an invading force, for there was nothing to bomb. The mountain ranges and rivers ran from north to south in both eastern Tibet and Sikang, making invasion exceptionally difficult from the east. Narrow passes could be held against powerful forces, immense losses inflicted on the

invaders. In the past the Tibetans had beaten the Chinese off by rolling rocks down passes, and they could do better than that now.

But the Tibetans would never hold Chamdo. It was situated on a triangular peninsula formed by the Ngom Chu and Dza Chu, the West River and East River, which joined to form the Mekong just to the south of the town. On the north rose the hill on which the monastery stood, and the enemy could come down either side of it.

I looked up at the monastery as I rode back toward the town. It was the largest in Kham, but certainly not the most beautiful: a brown and white red-fringed building, or rather collection of buildings, with a few gilded ornaments glinting on the roofs. Physically and spiritually it dominated the town. It was the biggest landowner in the region, and in Tibet a landowner owned the tenants like serfs. Before I could engage my boy Tenné he had to get a formal release from the owner of the estate on which he was born.

The monastery housed two thousand monks, and they were supported by the three thousand people who lived in Chamdo. The monks did no work and did not even look after their own needs. Half a dozen women spent their lives carrying tubs of water, holding about four gallons each, up that hill from dawn till dusk. They lived at the foot of the hill, quite near the radio station, and I never looked at it without seeing them going up or down. Tibetans drink at least fifty bowls of tea a day. Far more women would have been needed if the monks had also washed.

The monastery was quite new, for the old one was destroyed by the Chinese in 1912. They had never been forgiven for that. The only relics of the Chinese occupation were a ruined temple in the town and the neglected graves of their fallen soldiers by the river, one of the very few cemeteries in

the country. The frozen ground is too hard for burials, so the Tibetans cut their dead to pieces and pound the bones and mix them with barley meal to make them more appetizing for the vultures and crows. I reflected that I would be disposed of like that if I died in Tibet.

The "fortress of Chamdo," as the world was later to hear of it, is not pretty from whichever direction it is approached. There is some green to the south, but the town itself is a featureless huddle of mud houses, drab and brown. The only fortifications were the wooden doors on the bridges.

I felt like an alien as I returned to Chamdo that day. Then a trader, seeing me approach, got off his pony and bowed. Old Smiler put out his tongue again and stuck up his thumbs to show his high estimation of my value; I reminded him I had paid him last month, and he admitted the fact with a grin. A fellow official smiled and reminded me to come to his party the next day. Everyone smiled.

I was not the loneliest Briton in the world—not alone at all. They accepted me, whatever Radio Peking might say. It would be hard to leave.

I had first come to Tibet by accident. I was a sergeant instructor at an R.A.F. radio school in Hyderabad in 1945, and applied for posting to an operational unit because I was bored with my job. Instead, I was offered a temporary posting to Lhasa, to relieve the radio officer at the British Mission while he was on three months' leave. That was Reginald Fox.

The three weeks' pony journey across the Himalayas seemed high adventure then, and I enjoyed all the thrills of the new Europeans who have been privileged to enter Lhasa. I was awed by the Potala, the great palace of the Dalai Lama, blessed by His Holiness, entertained by the most hos-

pitiable people in the world, and fell in love with Tibet. When I left I thought I would never see it again.

Another accident saved me from going back to Hyderabad. A new radio officer was needed at the British Residency at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, the Indian state that has been called the anteroom to Tibet. I was given the job, and stayed there for nearly two years in daily contact with Fox.

When I first went to Lhasa there were only two radio transmitters in Tibet. One was at the British Mission, the other at the Chinese Mission; but the Tibetans had some radio equipment of their own stored in crates. During the war they had allowed two American officers to go through Tibet in search of a supply line to China when the Burma Road was closed. In gratitude the President of the United States gave the Tibetans three complete radio stations, which they wanted for internal communications. Because of their traditional policy of seclusion they did not want any foreigners to operate them, so they asked Fox to train Tibetans for the work in his spare time. When I relieved him I took over this training as well.

For a variety of reasons the scheme was not a success, and in 1947 the Tibetans reluctantly decided they would have to bring in technicians from outside. They tried to get Indians, as being less foreign than Europeans; but no suitable candidates applied. I tested some of the applicants in Gangtok, to save them the long journey to Lhasa; and, not very hopefully, I applied to the Tibetan government for employment myself.

My offer was accepted. I went back to England and was released from the R.A.F., and returned to Lhasa in the summer of 1948. I was given a middle rank in the Tibetan hierarchy, and became the first European to receive the Dalai Lama's blessing as a Tibetan government official.

I shall never forget the last time I walked up to the throne

where His Holiness sat cross-legged, wearing his claret-colored lama robe and the tall yellow pointed hat that was his crown. He greeted me with a smile, when all other heads were bowed low: for a Buddhist may not look on the face of his God. I presented the traditional white scarf with swastika borders, and then the three symbolical offerings: an image made of butter representing the Buddha's body, a copy of the Holy Scriptures representing his speech, and a miniature temple representing his mind. Then I bowed, and the Dalai Lama placed both hands on my head—a great honor, for this two-handed blessing was normally reserved for officials of the highest ranks. His Holiness honored me further by presenting me with a small red silk scarf which he had knotted with his own hands. I followed custom by wearing it round my neck for the rest of the day.

There was only one part of the prescribed ritual that I did not perform myself. Had I been a Tibetan I should have been required to prostrate myself three times before the throne. It was impossible for me to do this sincerely—not because I was a European, but because I was not a Buddhist; and my own religion forbade it. It would have been as improper as for a Tibetan to take Holy Communion in a Christian church. This was therefore done for me by another official. He also offered tea to the Dalai Lama on my behalf, first drinking some himself to show that it was not poisoned.

Then I sat on a cushion and was served with rice and butter tea. I flicked a few grains of rice over my right shoulder as an offering to the gods, and sipped my tea while Tashi and Lobsang and my servants filed quickly past the throne. Junior officials were blessed with the right hand only, and commoners were lightly touched with a tassel suspended from a small rod. The Dalai Lama bestowed his blessings with dignity and majesty, and relaxed only to give me a

broad smile of farewell that reminded me that he was a boy of fourteen.

Mainly because of trouble over equipment, I stayed in Lhasa for nearly a year. During that time I built and opened Radio Lhasa, and for the first time Tibet was able to broadcast to the outside world.

It had already been arranged that I should open another station in Chamdo, and someone was needed to take over in Lhasa. As a result of the Transfer of Power, whereby India achieved independence, the British Mission had become the Indian Mission, and Fox was expecting to be replaced. He was already working for the Tibetan government in his spare time, building a new hydroelectric station together with Peter Aufschnaiter, the German agricultural engineer who had reached Lhasa with Heinrich Harrer after escaping from British internment at Dehra Dun. Fox resigned from the Indian Mission and also became a Tibetan government official. Then I set out for Chamdo.

I left Lhasa in charge of a caravan of twenty riding animals, eighty mules and yaks, ten muleteers, forty porters, and an armed escort of twelve soldiers. Besides all the radio equipment I took four hundred gallons of petrol for the engines. The journey over the mountains took more than two months, and parts of the route had never been reached by a European before. I camped with nomads, dodged bandits, doctored the sick, crossed yak-hide bridges, forded rivers, crossed high mountain passes, and witnessed a miracle performed by an incarnate lama. When I arrived at Chamdo the whole population turned out to stare at my blue eyes, long nose, and especially the ginger beard I had grown on the way. When I appeared clean-shaven the next morning the rumor went round that two Europeans had arrived at Chamdo.

That was only five months ago, but now Phodo Kusho—Ford Esquire—was no longer a curiosity but accepted as a member of the community. I had picked up enough words of the Khamba dialect to be able to talk to the local inhabitants, they invited me freely to their homes, and they had even got used to the marvel of radio. But it was not such a marvel in a land where levitation was commonplace, and holy “wind men” traveled hundreds of miles in a day.

At 4 P.M. I had my last schedule of the day with Fox. It always did me good to hear his voice, although we could not say anything over the radio that we did not want to be overheard. I knew for a fact that my transmissions were being monitored by the Chinese Communists. But at least I could ask him if he had heard the news from Radio Peking.

“Yes, Bob. Don’t worry. It’ll work out.”

Fox’s roots in Tibet were deeper than mine. Born in London, a dispatch rider in World War I, he had gone to Lhasa in 1937, just after the British Mission was established. He had been there ever since. Now he had a Tibetan wife and three lovely children with their father’s fair hair and their mother’s almond eyes. Tibet was his homeland now, and he always said he was there for life.

After a brief chat we switched over to the key. We dealt first with the government messages, which were in a code that neither of us knew. Then we handled the commercial traffic, which was in a published numerical code. A trader came in to speak to a friend in Lhasa, and before he began I gave him the usual warning that anyone with a radio receiver in Lhasa could listen in. Our service had come under heavy suspicion in the early days, after a Chamdo trader told his Lhasa agent to buy all the calico he could—and every

scrap of calico had gone by the time the agent reached the market.

At 5 P.M. Fox put Radio Lhasa on the air. The news was read in Tibetan, then in English by Fox, and finally in Chinese by the Dalai Lama's brother-in-law, a young peasant from Tsinghai. I relayed it to Sikang, Tsinghai, and as much more of China as my low-powered transmitter could reach. I was mildly disappointed that no reference was made to the threat from Radio Peking, although I had not really expected an immediate Tibetan reaction.

Later that evening I tried to contact some radio amateur in England. It was only a formality, for bad conditions had made communication with Europe impossible for several weeks. I searched the twenty-meter band for a call sign beginning with G, but without luck; and I knew that if I could not receive I had no chance of being heard with my low power. I spoke to an amateur in Australia, and then closed down.

At 10 P.M. I tuned in to Radio Peking for the news in Tibetan. These broadcasts had only begun recently, and evidently it had not yet dawned on the Chinese that almost all Tibetans are in bed by nine. They rise early because the first part of the day is the most auspicious. So I was the only person in Tibet to hear that broadcast, which was a little more explicit than the version I had heard in English.

"The tasks for the People's Liberation Army for 1950 are to liberate Formosa, Hainan, and Tibet," said the announcer, "from American and British imperialism."

2

Moment of Decision

ON THE SIXTH OF JANUARY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED its *de facto* recognition of the People's government of China.

I included the announcement in the daily news summary that I prepared for Lhalu by monitoring the chief radio stations of the world. Soon after I had sent it to the Residency Rimshi Trokao came in.

"Does this mean that the British have made friends with the Communists?" he asked.

They would all be asking me that. Lhalu would know what *de facto* recognition meant, but probably he was the only one.

Rimshi Trokao was the lay head of the Governor General's Executive Council—nearly all official posts were held in duplicate, monk and lay—and he was Lhalu's right-hand man. He was over fifty, an old man by Tibetan standards, and had a drooping mustache and a few more whiskers on his chin of which he was very proud. He was able, clever, and shrewd. He kept the government code, and did all the

coding and decoding himself; and there were not many men in Tibet, even in the official class, capable of that.

To that extent he was exceptional. He was typical in that he had never been out of Tibet and was utterly innocent of international affairs.

I tried to explain the meaning of *de facto* recognition. Tibetan has no diplomatic vocabulary, and it had not been easy to translate the term for Lhalu.

"It is a fact that the Communists won the Chinese Civil War," I said. "It is a fact that they are now the actual rulers of nearly all China. The British government has recognized these facts. That does not mean it likes them. It doesn't. But it cannot see any gain in pretending they do not exist."

Perhaps I oversimplified. It was certainly too simple for the tortuous ways of Tibetan politics.

"Britain has helped us to keep the Chinese out in the past," said Rimshi Trokao. "Will they help us now?"

"I am an official of the Tibetan, not the British, government," I reminded him. "I don't know. I imagine it all depends on India. Since the Transfer of Power, Britain no longer has any direct strategic or commercial interest in Tibet. Britain and the other Western powers are opposed to all aggression and do not want Communism to spread, but the only way to Tibet is through India. I don't suppose the Indians want to see Chinese troops on their northern frontier, but that does not mean they will send their own troops to your help."

I remembered something I had read in one of Sir Charles Bell's books. He had been British Political Officer for Tibet, and the first white man to come into contact with the Dalai Lama. He said that if the British left India the Indians would not be able to protect Tibet against Chinese aggression even

if they had the will. Bell wrote that long before China had an efficient unified army, and now India was not showing much will.

"They can send us arms," said Rimshi Trokao. "They can let others send us arms. Do you think Britain will give us airplanes?" Airplanes! He had been looking at the pictures in some of my illustrated magazines.

"Who would fly them if they did?"

"Our soldiers, of course. You could show them how to—you were in the British Air Force."

It was the sort of conversation I could have had with any of the officials. Lhalu also talked about airplanes, and had a fantastic idea of basing them on some other country so that the Chinese would not know Tibet had them. The only obstacle he could see was that the monks would not allow airplanes to fly over Tibet. They said they would disturb the gods that dwelt in the upper air. There was no getting round this, and the senior Cabinet Minister was always a monk.

I was regarded as an expert not only on aviation and radio but on almost every other subject under the sun, except the Buddhist religion. The Tibetans were ignorant because they had no means of acquiring knowledge. There were almost no Tibetan books, except the scriptures; no newspapers, except a sheet that was published once a week in Kalimpong; no cinemas; and there had been no radio until a year ago. As a result Europeans in Tibet were regarded as experts on everything, and the fact that I had been to an English grammar school made me the only educated man in Chamdo.

The heart of the trouble was that there were no real Tibetan schools. One or two had been started in Lhasa, but they were very elementary and catered mostly to the children of traders. An English school had been founded in Lhasa

by a man named Parker during World War II, but the monks had forced him to close it after only six months. Most of the officials' sons had private tutors at home, who were themselves uneducated, and then were trained for government service in the Finance Office. A few had been educated in India, and they too were regarded as walking encyclopedias by their compatriots. There were none of these in Chamdo.

Lhalu knew more than the other officials because his father was one of the very few Tibetans who ever went to England. Lhalu himself had not been out of Tibet, but he was keenly interested in the outside world and studied the pictures in my illustrated magazines. He wanted to know about tractors and other agricultural machinery and about industrial processes in the West. He was typical of the more progressive Tibetan officials. They knew they were backward, and genuinely wanted to learn and to modernize their country—so long as no harm was done to their religion.

Because of his high rank Lhalu was a lonely man in Chamdo. He was so far above all the other officials that he had no social life at all. He could not even carry on an intelligent conversation in private with Rimshi Trokao, who was bound to agree with everything Lhalu said and to talk only in reverent monosyllables and with much sucking in of his breath. I was not expected to behave in this way, and Lhalu encouraged me to talk freely and naturally, without too much respect for his rank.

I used to go to the Residency every Saturday, usually for lunch and often for the whole day. Naturally he did not discuss Tibetan politics with me, but he asked my opinion on many aspects of defense. I did not presume to say what I thought Tibet should do in her relations with China and other

countries. Her foreign policy was her own affair. But the results of that policy concerned me very much.

Early in the New Year we learned that five separate "good-will missions" were preparing to leave Tibet. Their purpose was to demonstrate the country's independence, and presumably in some cases to negotiate for aid. Their respective destinations were Britain, the United States, India, Nepal, and Communist China. The members were appointed. Preparations for departure were made. Then Peking intervened.

The Communist government said that the proposed missions were illegal, because Tibet was not an independent state but a part of the Chinese People's Republic. This was the traditional Chinese point of view. The Tibetans were invited to send representatives to Peking alone for "the peaceful solution of the question of Tibet." A warning was issued, obviously directed at India, that any country receiving one of the "illegal" missions would be considered as "entertaining hostile intentions against the Chinese People's Republic."

None of the good-will missions ever left Lhasa.

Peking repeated the "liberation" threat. Lhasa still did not reply.

I listened to every news bulletin broadcast by Radio Lhasa, and I never heard even the mildest expression of defiance. Not once did Tibet say she would defend herself against aggression; not once did she even assert her independence. Every reference to China was conciliatory and polite. I could almost hear the words sticking in Fox's throat.

I began to wonder if my problem might be solved for me. Peking was talking of American and British imperialists using Tibet as a back door for aggression against China. Perhaps the Tibetans would decide to get rid of me to appease the

Chinese. Then we heard that a Tibetan delegation was leaving Lhasa to try to negotiate with the Chinese. Perhaps by May the Tibetans would have given in.

When I thought of this I realized that my motives for wanting to stay were not so unselfish as I would have liked to believe. I did not want to go, because I liked being where I was.

The radio station and my own quarters occupied the upper floor of the old Summer Palace which the Governor General had used for entertaining before the new Residency was built. It stood outside the town, at the foot of the hill on which the monastery stood, and the grounds were enclosed by a wall. Rimshi Trokao lived in the same compound and was my nearest neighbor.

It was very pleasant and quite parklike, and there were stores inside the compound where I could keep the petrol for the engines. This petrol had been my greatest worry on the journey, for the nomads persisted in using the cans as windbreakers when they lit their fires and cooked their meals. It was, of course, the first time petrol had ever been taken to Chamdo. The only disadvantage about the station was that it lay on the east of the town while the Residency was on the west. That was why Dimön Depön was going to put up a new building for me.

Besides my boy Tenné, my establishment consisted of my cook, Do-Tseten, and my personal bodyguard, a soldier named Puntso. The two clerks, Lobsang and Tashi, lived in the town with their wives and children. Both were very junior officials, and they had been among the Tibetans originally chosen for training as radio operators. I had first met them when I relieved Fox in 1945. They had given up trying to operate and were now simply clerks. They were essential

to me, as, although I could now speak Tibetan quite fluently, I had not had time to learn the written language.

Tibetan children were tough. Tashi had brought his daughter from Lhasa, a girl aged nine, and she had ridden her pony without complaint the whole way. Lobsang's children were too young—even by Tibetan standards—to ride by themselves. His elder son, aged five, had sat in front of his father's servant, while the other boy, who was three, was swaddled in a cloth and carried on the back of a porter, like my jar of concentrated sulphuric acid.

The four Indian trainees also lived in the town. They were Indian by nationality only, for all were of Tibetan stock. From the beginning it had been decided that the radio network should eventually be staffed by Tibetans, but I had told the government that we could not train men who had not had an ordinary elementary education. So Fox had recruited suitable young men in the Indian border states, while I had found a few Moslems who were living in Lhasa. Four of Fox's recruits joined me at Chamdo, while he trained the rest in Lhasa.

I was giving the Indians the full course that I had taught at the radio school in Hyderabad when I was an instructor in the R.A.F. This included radio theory as well as operating technique, and I reckoned it would take until September to complete their training. To prevent the Indians from coming to Tibet for free tuition and then taking jobs at home, each had signed a contract for five years' service after his training was finished. They had also agreed to go anywhere in Tibet.

At the beginning of February Lhalu asked me if I could cut the course short and get the Indians ready to operate portable radios as quickly as possible. He wanted them to set up stations at garrison posts on the frontier.

"How soon could they be ready?" he asked.

"If I change the training program I can bring their operating up to standard in a month," I said. "They will still not be trained radio mechanics. It would be better if they began working in pairs."

"Find out how they feel about it," Lhalu told me. "Of course," he added, playing with his rosary, "I shall not send them out until I know whether you are going to apply to renew your contract."

I said I would give him my decision within the month.

"I shan't be sorry to get out of here," said Sonam Dorje, the eldest of the four. "I always said the Chinese could take it in their sleep. If there's going to be a war I'd rather be on the frontier than cooped up in Chamdo."

Sonam Dorje was of mixed Nepali-Tibetan descent, and had been educated at Darjeeling High School. He had been in the Indian Army and fought in the Burma campaign. He was a few years older than I was, in his early thirties, and still had something of the soldier about him, even in his gaily colored Tibetan robe.

Wangda, the second oldest, was also ready to go. Wangda was ready to do anything. He was happy-go-lucky and devil-may-care, quite fearless, a great humorist and a born storyteller. He also came from Darjeeling and had taught English in the Chinese school there. In Chamdo he had acquired a wife.

"Tsering will come," he said. "She's a Khamba—I'll need her as my bodyguard."

Of course she would go. In Tibet a woman always went with her husband. The troops had their wives and children with them right on the frontier, and no one dreamed of suggesting they might be evacuated.

Dronyer, who came from Kalimpong and had worked in Tibet for a trader, said he could do with a move. He was of

much the same type as Wangda, and these two were later to help keep my spirits up when there was little to joke about.

Sonam Puntso, the youngest of the four, simply said he would go. He was my star pupil, and one of the nicest lads I ever met. Quiet and serious, quick-witted and intelligent, he was easily the best operator and already well advanced in radio theory. He was Sikkimese, and I had played football against him when he was a schoolboy in Gangtok. He was only nineteen; at twenty-six I felt for him a sort of paternal responsibility.

I changed the training program, putting up a station in the courtyard and making them concentrate on operating procedure. I had to abandon radio theory, and gave them a compressed course on maintenance and simple fault-finding. Sonam Puntso would be ready to take a station out within the month. He was the last of them I wanted to send to the frontier.

But I was by no means sure that any of them would need to go.

The Tibetan delegation had arrived in India. The Chinese had invited it to go to Peking. Radio Lhasa was still non-committal. There were rumors of Communist activity in Sikang. A thin crackle of rifle fire told me that Dimön Depön had received his ammunition, but there was still no sign of troop reinforcements or modern automatic weapons.

Then everything stopped for the Tibetan New Year.

Or rather everything started for the New Year.

Preparations began some days before, and I was involved when Tharchi Tsendron came and asked if he could have my aerial masts taken down and fitted with new prayer flags. Tharchi was a young monk official in charge of labor and

public works, and he had helped me greatly in converting part of the Summer Palace into a radio station. He had also become my closest friend in Chamdo. He was always anxious to see that I was properly protected by the gods, and now he wanted prayer flags on the aerials as well as the poles. I drew the line at that and told him he would have to put the new prayer flags on the masts without taking them down, but I agreed to having an incense burner on the roof.

The huge poles outside the Residency were taken down and re-erected with new prayer flags, and more new flags festooned the roof tops of Chamdo. Monks began to come in from the outlying villages, and more women were engaged to carry water up to the monastery. Housewives baked New Year cakes, ordinary work almost ceased, and military training was suspended while the troops helped in the preparations for the holiest day in the Tibetan calendar, the first day of the first month.

On New Year's Eve I went up to the monastery to watch the traditional lama dances. Lhalu was there, seated on a throne in his finest regalia, and I took my place with the other officials. Opposite was a lama band of drums and cymbals and nine-foot horns. There was the famous Black Hat Dance, which commemorates the assassination of a wicked Tibetan king in the ninth century; the Skeleton Dance, in which the monks wore huge grotesque masks hideously deathlike, and were dressed to look like animated corpses; and the Warrior Dance, for which the performers appeared clad in long robes, wearing helmets, and carrying swords and shields. All was in honor of the Buddha, who was going to defeat the Chinese.

I went to bed early, for I had to get up again before dawn. I also had to put on a European suit. Ironically, the only occasions when I could not wear Tibetan clothes were when

I attended functions as a Tibetan government official; for my short hair and unpierced ears made it impossible for me to appear properly dressed.

My suit was poor protection against the cold and uncomfortable to ride in, and I was glad when we reached the top of the hill. We rode into the courtyard of the monastery, where other officials were already dismounting from their ponies, which wore bright saddlecloths and had silver and gold filigree on their saddles. We stood chatting until a servant rode in and announced the approach of the Governor General.

Two incense burners were lighted on either side of the entrance to the main hall of the monastery, and we lined up in order of rank. There were about twenty Lhasa officials, and I was sixth. Tharchi Tsendron was just below me, and Tashi and Lobsang were at the lower end of the line.

Mounted soldiers of the Governor General's bodyguard rode in, followed by trumpeters and Lhalu's personal standard-bearer. Then came more soldiers, Lhalu's equerry and then his chief steward and two servants; and then the trumpeters blew a fanfare as Lhalu came in himself, resplendent in a dragon-patterned robe of fur-trimmed yellow silk and brocade, and wearing a fur-trimmed hat. He was followed by more servants and about forty soldiers.

Two servants held his pony while others helped him to dismount, and we bowed our heads as he walked along the line. Then he entered the monastery, and we followed slowly, still in order of rank.

The main hall, lit only from the roof and by a few butter lamps below the images, was hung with huge silk and brocade banners and paintings. We walked up one side, and Lhalu sat cross-legged on a high cushion at the end. We also

sat down, and the thickness of our cushions was so graded that our heads were in a continuous descending line. Monks took their seats on the opposite side of the hall, headed by Shiwala and Pakpala, the two incarnate lamas. Pakpala Rimpoche looked across at me curiously as I sat cross-legged in a European suit with a wooden tea bowl on my lap. He was only nine.

Two theologians came out and began a religious disputation. I had seen them practising this for weeks outside the radio station. Each in turn threw off his outer robe and, with bare arms pounding palm into fist and slapping thighs, drove his points home with exaggerated poses and gestures. Few understood what they were saying. According to Tharchi Tsendron their theology was too profound for anyone except the Dalai Lama himself.

Then a drum-and-fife band struck up, and in trooped thirteen boys in blue and red flowered robes and tam-o'-shanters. Each carried a small battle-ax. They performed a jerky, stylized dance with some acrobatics, of such antiquity that its meaning had long been forgotten.

Tea was served, and servants brought in the New Year gifts of meat and bread. They were placed on low tables in front of us, and we each received a whole sheep's carcass that had been blessed by the incarnate lamas. There was more theological disputing, the boys danced again, and more tea was served; and the cycle was repeated a third time. Then we all rose and, led by Lhalu, walked in procession before the huge gilt images of the Buddha at the head of the hall. We touched the feet of each image with our foreheads, and presented ceremonial white scarves to the biggest. Then Lhalu led the way out of the hall.

Incense was still burning and the monk musicians were

playing their clarinets and trumpets and conch shells as we returned to the courtyard; the troops presented arms and the trumpeters blew a fanfare as Lhalu mounted his horse. All Chamdo was assembled outside the courtyard when he rode out. He went to each of the private chapels of the two incarnate lamas, the *rimpoches*, and we followed in turn to present scarves, receive blessings, and drink more butter tea.

The rest of the day was spent in visiting and receiving calls. I went first to Lhalu, with a white scarf and presents, and then to the other officials senior to myself and to my friends. Afterward I returned to my own quarters, where junior officials came with scarves and presents for me. It was a moving experience, unique for a European, and it made my kinship with the Tibetans complete.

But their gods were not my gods, and as the New Year celebration went on I began to feel like an outsider. It was all pageantry to me, but to them it was the very breath of life. And this year it had an added significance: it was their defense against the Chinese.

The celebrations had never been on such a large scale before. More prayer services were held, more incense burners lit, more prayer flags were put up than ever before. Soldiers were relieved of military duties to join civilians in making the circuit of the Holy Walk round the monastery; their extra prayers might make all the difference between victory and defeat.

This was not confined to Chamdo. The same fervor was being shown in Lhasa and all over the country. Everywhere there were more dancing monks, bigger butter images, brighter butter lamps. Prayer wheels were turned unceasingly, rosaries were never still, and all hearts and hopes were turned to the gods. Except mine.

I was not the loneliest Briton in the world. I was the loneliest Christian.

I was completely alone. The Indians were also Buddhists, and Wangda's wife was devout.

A yak strayed into the compound and walked about in my vegetable garden. I sent Tenné to drive it off. It came again, and I sent a message to the owner to keep it under control. It came a third time, and to teach the owner a lesson I told Tenné to keep it for the night. I forgot I would have to feed it.

Tsering reminded me. She was angry.

"My father is a yak," she said. She even knew in which part of Tibet he was grazing.

Lobstang and Tashi assured me it was true. An incarnate lama had told Tsering that her father had been reincarnated as a yak. They knew that the lama was a very wise and holy man. Then they asked for a morning off as they wanted to help in casting out some devils.

I respected the Buddhist religion, as the Buddhists respected mine. They are the most tolerant people in the world and never try to proselytize. But the Tibetan form of Buddhist is mixed with the earlier animist religion of the country, and I could not respect belief in magic and ghost traps; at least, I could not respect the belief that they would defeat the Chinese.

It was absurd to stay. It was absurd to throw in my lot, perhaps at the risk of my life, with people who relied not on their own efforts but on a distorted form of a religion in which I did not believe.

I felt moody and depressed when I went up to the monastery on the fifteenth of the first month to watch the Festival of the Images. Huge figures made of colored butter had been

rigged up on scaffolding, some of them forty feet high. At dusk they were lit up by thousands of tiny butter lamps, throwing them into relief. Lhalu inspected the images, all of which had been made in monasteries, and awarded a prize for the best. Then Khambas came into the courtyard brandishing torches of tightly bound bundles of grass that had been soaked in paraffin, and ran round and round the images, making them look fantastic and grotesque. It was a thrilling sight.

"The gods will give us victory," Lhalu told me the next day.

I said nothing.

"Phodo," he said gently, "I do not think you understand. We do not appeal to the gods out of fear. We turn to them with hope and confidence. The Chinese have more soldiers. The Chinese have better arms. Therefore, if we fight they should win. But the Chinese have no gods. Our gods are our best weapon, and with their help we shall win."

I was still silent. There was nothing to say.

"Have you heard the story of my father's downfall?" Lhalu asked suddenly.

I had heard one version. Lhalu's father had been Commander in Chief under the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and was said to have tried to set himself up as dictator during the struggle for power after the God-King's death. He had been overthrown, and, as the Buddhist religion does not allow capital punishment, blinded and imprisoned in the dungeon below the Potala. He had been kept there for five years, and had died soon after Lhalu secured his release.

"When the Great Thirteenth departed to the Heavenly Field," said Lhalu, "some men of power wanted to betray Tibet to the Chinese. My father opposed them, and sent defiant messages to Chiang Kai-shek telling him to leave us

alone. Then he was lured by his enemies to the Potala, where they arrested him. They said afterward that they found two pieces of paper in his boots. They said that he managed to swallow one, but they seized the other and found the name of a Cabinet Minister written on it. Then, of course, my father was convicted of trying to kill him by witchcraft, and his eyes were put out. But the story was false."

I thought it sounded a little far-fetched.

"My father never practised witchcraft," said Lhalu. "His enemies practised witchcraft against him. They have practised witchcraft against me. When that failed they used bullets."

I had also heard the story of the attempt to assassinate Lhalu, which had been made shortly before he left for Chamdo, while I was still in Gangtok. He had been riding to his home outside Lhasa at dusk, and his horse had been shot under him.

He told a servant to bring the robe he had been wearing at the time.

"Look," he said, holding it up. "You see the holes? Those bullets passed clean through my body without leaving a mark. Now I will show you why." He revealed a small bundle wrapped in silk. "These are prayers," he said. "They have been blessed by the Presence"—that is, the Dalai Lama—"and I always wear them next to my skin. Not only have they protected me, but they have brought about the downfall of my enemies."

He was referring to Kapshöpa, one of the men who had brought about the downfall of Lhalu's father. Kapshöpa had been made a Cabinet Minister in 1945, and I had been a guest at one of the parties he gave to celebrate the occasion. Recently he had been deposed and degraded for intrigues with the Chinese. He had escaped the usual punishment of

a public flogging by paying a heavy fine; but he had been forced to submit to public ridicule by riding out of Lhasa dressed in white clothes on a yak. All his estates had been confiscated, and he had been banished to southern Tibet.

"The gods have saved my life, so is it surprising that I look to the gods for help against the Chinese?" said Lhalu. "You also have a God. Do you not seek His help?"

"Yes," I said. "But we have a saying in England that God helps those who help themselves."

"A very good saying!" said Lhalu. "Very good indeed. I think so too. We are helping ourselves. More troops and arms are being sent to Chamdo. Bren guns and Sten guns will come in three days' time."

To my surprise they came—and suddenly everything changed. The Tibetan delegation was still in India and had refused the invitation to go to Peking. The leaders of the delegation said they would meet the Chinese on neutral ground. They also said their purpose was to negotiate a non-aggression treaty based on Chinese recognition of Tibet's independence. I had a letter from a very reliable source in Lhasa telling me that the government was determined not to yield. A new radio station, operated by two of Fox's trainees, was set up at Nagchu, the garrison town protecting the only direct track from Tsinghai to Lhasa. Radio Lhasa still did not tell the world that Tibet would defend herself if attacked, but now I was sure she would. And she was not going to rely on the gods alone.

Instructors were sent with the Bren guns, and the first practice crackles of those weapons were the sweetest music I had heard since I arrived in Chamdo. The Tibetan Army began to look a little less like something out of the Middle Ages.

Then the crackling stopped, and a little later there were shouts in the courtyard below. Tenné came running upstairs to tell me that one of the soldiers was seriously hurt.

He was nearly dead.

He had been brought in on an improvised stretcher with his knee-cap blown off. He was not groaning—Tibetans have an unbelievable capacity for bearing pain—but I gave him a shot of morphia after stopping the bleeding with a tourniquet. Then I had to make the ghastly decision whether to amputate.

I had no surgical instruments or experience, but I was the best doctor in Chamdo because I was not a Tibetan Buddhist and had learned first aid in the Boy Scouts. The only professional doctors in Tibet were the medical monks, and the most highly prized medicine was the Dalai Lama's urine. I had brought a medicine chest to Chamdo, and used most of the contents in treating the local population as well as I could. I had set fractures, stitched wounds, and cured diseases I could not diagnose with penicillin. But I had never amputated.

Lack of instruments was no excuse for inaction. All over Tibet I had seen men who had been deprived of an arm or a leg for theft, and they looked healthy enough. Penal amputations were done without antiseptics or sterile dressings, and at least I had these. If removing this man's leg would save his life I had to chop it off. And at least there was not much left to chop.

I did not think he would live anyway, but I decided to do it. Then his breathing changed, there was a rattle in his throat, and he was dead.

I wiped off my sweat and loathed myself for my feeling of relief. Then I imagined what it would be like after a battle, and the thought kept me awake that night. There was not

even a pretense of a medical service in the Army, and I was the only person in Chamdo with the faintest idea of treating casualties.

The next morning I went to Lhalu and told him I wanted to renew my contract.

Of course it was not just cause and effect. I did not decide to stay to save lives, when I had hardly any drugs and dressings and was not even a trained medical orderly. Amateur doctoring came into it, but it was only one of the things.

When I am asked why I stayed I can give a dozen reasons, and each is true but none is the whole truth. I stayed because it would have been cowardly to run away; because I thought the Tibetans needed help and were worth helping; because I felt responsible for the Indians; because I liked and respected Lhalu. I stayed because I had a well-paid, interesting job and knew I could not get anything so good in England. I stayed because I preferred a life of adventure to nine-till-six drab routine. I stayed because I liked Tibet, or because I enjoyed life in Tibet and wanted it to go on.

I did not stay because I was unaware of the risks. I knew the danger when I took the first step on the road that was to lead to that filthy prison in Chungking. And I knew that this was the moment of decision. Whatever happened now I was committed to staying so long as the Tibetans resisted the Chinese. If they surrendered I would have to try to get out as best I could.

But I still do not know what I would have done if Shiwala Rimpoche had been able to tell me what lay ahead.

3

The Khamba Levies

RATHER OPTIMISTICALLY I SUGGESTED THAT MY NEW CONTRACT should be for five years, again renewable at mutual option. I also asked Lhalu to write for six months' leave in 1951 if conditions should permit. He sent my proposals to the Foreign Office in Lhasa, and repeated his promise to get me out of the country if the Chinese were allowed in.

"Now I can send stations out to the frontier," he said.

"All the Indians can operate adequately now," I said. "But they're not fully trained mechanics, and it would be better if they could start off in pairs."

I need not have worried about this, for there were no portable stations for them to take.

The story of the radio equipment is long and tortuous. First of all the engines sent by the Americans did not generate enough power to work the stations, because of the rarefied air. New engines were asked for, and this time it was suggested that they should be diesels. I was told that diesels had arrived, and I arranged for the supply of diesel oil while I was in India, only to find petrol engines when I got to Lhasa.

The engines had been dismantled and crated and carried by porters over the Himalayas, and when I put them together I found that some of the parts had got lost on the way. Only one engine was complete, and that was used for the radio station in Lhasa. Spare parts for the others were ordered, and I took one incomplete engine to Chamdo. If I had relied on getting the spare parts I would not have been on the air yet. But fortunately I had bought two portable radio transmitters and receivers in India, and the engines originally sent by the Americans were powerful enough for these. In Lhasa I offered to put my equipment at the disposal of the government in order to get the link with Chamdo into operation, and I was still using them.

I had told Lhalu that portable radio equipment and engines could easily be bought in Calcutta, and he had asked the government to get some. Fox said none had arrived in Lhasa, and he doubted if they had even been ordered; he was not even sure that my order for spare parts for the big engines had been dealt with yet. The Foreign Office, which handled such matters, had only been started during the war, and it had not really got into its stride.

We also learned that the equipment at Nagchu was Fox's private property, which he had sold to the Tibetan government. Lhalu asked me if I would sell my two portables, one of which he proposed to send out to the frontier.

I asked Fox the current market price for the equipment, and was pleased to learn that it had gone up quite a lot since I bought the radios. I did not mind making a profit, as I had given the government free use of them for nine months. Besides, I needed money to replace the medical supplies I had used for treating Tibetans.

When I explained this to Lhalu he laughed.

"Phodo, you will never make a Tibetan after all," he said. "You wear Tibetan clothes, you drink butter tea, but you have not learned how to trade. You knew I wanted to buy those sets very badly, so why did you ask only the market price?"

Lhalu agreed that two of the Indians should take the station out, and left the choice to me. I chose Sonam Dorje because he was the eldest and Sonam Puntso because he was the most efficient. I was not very happy about sending him, and he was on my conscience for the next six years.

"Phodo Kusho, we cannot go tomorrow." It was Lobsang, who was going with them as their clerk. "It is an inauspicious day."

Oh, hell! I had completely forgotten to have it looked up.

"When's the next auspicious day?" I asked.

"There is a fairly auspicious day in a week's time," said Lobsang. "It is not very good, but I think it would do. Today is not inauspicious."

"I can't get the transport now, and the equipment won't be ready till this evening."

"It would be very inauspicious to leave in the evening," Lobsang pointed out.

No Tibetan would dream of starting a journey on an inauspicious day. My own departure from Lhasa had been delayed so that I could set out on an exceptionally auspicious day, although later I suspected some mistake was made over this. The Tibetan calendar is full of auspicious and inauspicious days, but I could never find out which they were. It is a lunar calendar, like the Chinese—and one year, thanks to an intercalary month, I had thirteen paydays—but they have made it complicated by omitting some inauspicious dates and duplicating dates that are auspicious. We seemed to have run into a bad patch. I went to report the matter to Lhalu. Per-

haps they could get a special dispensation from him or one of the incarnate lamas.

"It is very unfortunate," he said when I had told him. "I am anxious that the station should go out as quickly as possible. But it cannot be helped. They will just have to wait a week."

If I had respected him less I would have asked if the Army proposed to wait for an auspicious day before launching a counterattack; but even that could have happened in Tibet. I felt irritable when I rode back to the radio station, and my temper was not improved by the sight of Lobsang full of smiles.

But he had found a way out.

"I am going to ride out now," he said. "I shall pretend that I am starting the journey, and go a few miles out of Chamdo. Then the evil spirits will not watch for me tomorrow."

His wife was doubtful if it would work. She said she was not sure that the spirits were fooled so easily. And would it apply to the rest of them? To the Indians and her and the children—for, of course, they were going to the frontier too. But Lobsang persuaded her, and then hurried to set out while the sun was still rising in the sky; for all descents are inauspicious, and that is why all important things should be done early in the day.

The party left the next day according to plan. At least the journey was successful, and a few days later they radioed their arrival. They were stationed with a District Governor, and official coded messages were exchanged.

The radio station was set up at Dengko, and its importance can be seen from the map. There were very few tracks in Sikang, and the Chinese Army was almost bound to come along the main east-west trade route from Kangting to Chamdo. If it came all the way, so that the attack was from the east, it would be easy for the Chamdo troops to retreat

to Lhasa. But before the track reached the Upper Yangtze another route branched out to the northwest. This route ran past Dengko, but still on the other side of the river, and up to Jyekundo, in the province of Tsinghai. Jyekundo was almost due north of Chamdo, and from it a force could drive southward and cut the Chamdo-Lhasa track. Then we would have no means of escape except by fighting our way out.

Dengko was only two days' march from the point where the Kangting-Chamdo trade route forked to the northwest. It was also near enough to Jyekundo to get news if the Chinese sent troops from the north through Tsinghai. It was the ideal center for collecting and transmitting intelligence of troop movements on the other side of the frontier.

We knew now that the Chinese were marching through Sikang. Reports were brought by traders, and were usually so garbled and mixed up with omens and miracles that it was impossible to separate truth from romance; but there was no longer any doubt that the People's Liberation Army was coming our way.

A radio amateur in Australia told me I had been reported missing.

The rumor had evidently been started deliberately by a pirate station in Peking which was operating on my frequency and using my call sign. I contacted him myself one night, and when I challenged him he shut down at once. His location was deduced by an Australian in Hong Kong who had a directional aerial. What his purpose was I never discovered, but he certainly succeeded in worrying my parents. I was worried for their sake when I was told I had been reported missing in the British press.

Of course I had written letters, but the mail was very slow. Postal arrangements were complicated by the fact that

Tibet was not a member of the Universal Postal Union. I had to put each letter in three envelopes—the outermost one addressed to a Tibetan friend in Lhasa, the next to another friend living near the Tibet-Sikkim border, and the third to the letter's destination in England. The outer envelope bore no stamp as it was carried by government courier. The next needed a Tibetan stamp—not on sale in Chamdo, of course—which was valid only in Tibet. The third envelope needed an Indian stamp.

At the very best a letter from Chamdo took five weeks to reach my home in Burton-on-Trent, traveling by air from India. But that was exceptional. Since the radio link had been established the number of couriers going to Lhasa had been greatly reduced, and sometimes my letters were lying about for weeks in the Foreign Office before someone remembered to pass them to my friend.

I knew that newspaper reports about my part of the world were often alarming and almost always inaccurate, as they were based on rumors picked up outside Tibet, and I was very anxious to let my parents know I was safe. The bad radio conditions lasted longer than usual, and Fox was unable to help. Night after night I sat over my radio, trying desperately to contact England. Then at last I heard a weak call sign with the prefix G.

It was a general call from G5 JF, and as soon as the transmission stopped I gave out my own call sign, AC4 RF. There was no reply. My power was too low for my transmission to be heard in England.

G5 JF was picked up by a Swiss amateur, and I listened to their conversation. Finally G5 JF said:

“Am on the air every Wednesday, 1630 G.M.T. My position, Burton-on-Trent. CUAGN. [See you again.]”

Burton-on-Trent!

1630 G.M.T. was 10 P.M. Tibetan time, and I was waiting at my radio long before then the following Wednesday. Sure enough, G5 JF came on with a general call. Again I replied at once, my hand trembling on the key as I almost willed the dots and dashes through the ether.

G5 JF picked me up.

He was a tailor named Jefferies, and Wednesday was early-closing day in Burton-on-Trent. He knew me by repute, for he also had read in the press that I was missing. He promised to tell my parents that I was safe, and we arranged to speak again the following Wednesday.

Conditions were better then, and after making contact Jefferies went over on to voice.

"Can you operate phone?" he asked me.

"I can, but my power's too low for you to hear. I can hear you all right, though," I tapped out.

"I've got a surprise for you," said Jefferies. "Hold on a moment."

Then I heard another voice say:

"Hullo, Robert."

It was my father.

I was so overcome with emotion that I doubt if I could have replied even if I had been able to use phone. I tapped out an answering message, and at the other end Jefferies transcribed, and my father spoke again. In this way we exchanged news.

The following Wednesday I heard my mother's voice.

After that it became normal for my parents to ring me up on Wednesdays. They were never able to hear my voice, but all they wanted was to know I was safe. For me their voices were everything.

I told some of the Tibetans that I could hear my parents

talking from England, but they were not greatly impressed. They could not really understand how far away England was.

On April 16 the Chinese Communists invaded Hainan. Five days later Formosa claimed a tremendous victory, and from experience of their claims in the Civil War I concluded that they had suffered a heavy defeat. The capital of Hainan was evacuated the following day, and less than a week later it was all over.

Radio Peking's May Day message was a little shorter than the one I had heard on New Year's Day. Otherwise it was unchanged:

"The tasks of the People's Liberation Army for 1950 are to liberate Formosa and Tibet."

Three weeks later I heard Radio Peking offer Tibet "regional autonomy" and religious freedom if she would "achieve peaceful liberation." She was warned that she was "certain to be liberated in any event." She was also warned not to count on geographical difficulties or American or British help. The Tibetan government was again invited to send delegates with full negotiating powers to Peking.

Gyalo Thondup, a brother of the Dalai Lama, went to Formosa to confer with Chiang Kai-shek. The Tibetan delegation in India was now in Calcutta, preparing to fly to Hong Kong to meet the Chinese Communists there. It was not prepared to go to Peking.

Pandit Nehru said that he supported Tibet's claim to self-government but recognized that China was entitled to "a vague sort of suzerainty" over her. India let it be known that Tibet could not expect her to provide military aid.

Radio Lhasa said nothing.

In Chamdo there were reports that advance units of the People's Liberation Army were approaching the Upper

Yangtze. We also heard rumors that they were recruiting Khambas in Sikang.

I could not imagine that many Khambas would join the Communists, for on both sides of the Upper Yangtze they hated the Chinese.

This river was a purely political boundary, and it cut right through the old Kham as the Pyrenees divide the Basques. Like most of the Tsinghai in the north, Sikang had once been part of Tibet; and almost the whole population was still of the Tibetan race. I could not distinguish a Tibetan Khamba from a technically Chinese Khamba from Sikang. But it was very easy to distinguish any Khamba from a native of central or western Tibet.

The Khambas were tall and broad-shouldered, strong and hardy, and the least mongoloid-looking of all the Tibetans I had seen. Their noses were more angular, sometimes almost Aryan in appearance. They had their own dialect and culture, and a distinctive form of dress. They wore a fuller, wider gown, which they pulled up to their knees and tied at the waist; underneath they wore baggy trousers and leather-topped boots. Their hair was plaited in the usual single pig-tail, but it was threaded through jeweled rings and a long tassel hung down at the end.

Lhasa people regarded the Khambas as wild, lawless, and uncouth. When Radio Peking switched its Tibetan broadcasts to a more suitable hour it still had no audience, for the news reader spoke with a Khamba accent. I admired the Khambas for their independence and relative lack of servility. Even old Smiler did not stick his tongue out as far as the Lhasa beggars, although he practised the same spiritual blackmail. It was meritorious for a Buddhist to give to a beggar, and anyone who failed to make a regular contribution was threatened with a curse.

Lhasa officials regarded service in Kham as a form of exile, and they all longed to return to the capital. Yet competition for their appointments was keen, and at the end of their tour of duty—which was normally three years—they were compulsorily relieved. The reason was that the service was extremely lucrative. The officials had no salaries but were entitled to take as much profit on taxes as they could.

The collection of taxes in Tibet was simple and economical. The Governor General was told how much he was expected to raise from the whole of Kham. He added what he considered a fair profit, and divided the total among the various District Governors. Each District Governor added his profit and told the petty chiefs and headmen under him how much each of them would have to produce. They collected as much as they could and pocketed the surplus. This was the normal system throughout Tibet. The only properly salaried officials were Fox and me.

For the taxes they paid the Khambas got nothing in return except the protection of the Army, and that lived on the land. Yet there was no general resentment. It had always been like this, and the people knew nothing else. Tibet was underpopulated, and there was work for all and enough food for everyone. And most Khambas, for all their spirit of independence, were bound inseparably to the Lhasa government by their worship of the Dalai Lama.

This worship extended across the Upper Yangtze, but there were no Lhasa officials to collect taxes there. Instead, the people were squeezed by the Chinese.

“They will never fight for the Chinese,” old Khenchi Dawala told me. “You know what the Chinese did in Batang? They used our Holy Scriptures for soling their boots.”

I always thought of Khenchi Dawala as the Grand Old Man of Chamdo. He was over seventy—a tremendous age for

a Tibetan—and the only inhabitant who could remember having seen a European before. He had met Eric Teichman, a British consular officer in China, who had come to Chamdo in 1917 and stopped a war singlehanded.

Although a monk, Khenchi Dawala had fought in that war. He had fought so bravely that he had been rewarded with the high rank of *khenchi*, which made him senior even to Rimshi Trokao. For a Khamba his position was unique. After the Governor General he took precedence over every Lhasa official.

“The Chinese destroyed our monasteries and murdered incarnate lamas on both sides of the big river,” he said. “And they call us barbarians and treat us as inferiors. That is why we hate them. And that is where the British are different. You respect our religion and treat us as equals. That is why we like you.”

I had good reason to be grateful to Sir Charles Bell and the other British political officers who followed him into Tibet. Khenchi Dawala was old enough to remember the Younghusband Expedition of 1904, when we first entered the country; and the hard fact is that, whatever the provocation, we fought our way in. It was as humane an expedition as any military campaign can be; but Tibetan soldiers, assured by the monks that they were protected by magic from foreign bullets, were killed by British troops. The memory of that tragedy was effaced by subsequent British actions, and I did not even hear it mentioned until I was in a Chinese jail.

“What the Chinese call Sikang is part of Tibet,” said Khenchi Dawala. “All the people are Tibetans. They will not help the Chinese against their own brothers.”

“Will they help Tibet?” I asked.

“You mean, will they fight? That,” said Khenchi Dawala, “depends on the brothers Pangda Tsang.”

The three Pangda brothers were the most loved and most feared of all the Khambas, and their wealth and power were immense. The eldest, usually called by the family name alone, lived in Lhasa and was the biggest trader in Tibet. He was also the largest transport contractor, and he had brought in the radio equipment given by the United States. I had not met him in Lhasa, because he had been away on an official trade mission—the first that ever left Tibet. It had recently returned after a two years' tour round the world. I had been through Pangda Tsang's richly stocked warehouses when I searched Lhasa for the missing crates.

His two brothers, Topgye and Rapga, lived in Sikang. Topgye had already fought against the Chinese. He had also fought against the Tibetan regular Army, as leader of a minor Khamba revolt against the Lhasa government. He had retreated across the river, taking captured mountain guns and rifles and ammunition; and his brother in Lhasa had been compelled to pay reparations on his behalf. That was in the nineteen-thirties, but Topgye and Rapga were still exiled in Sikang. And there they ruled like feudal barons.

The Chinese had never really conquered Sikang. They had kept the Tibetan Army out, and put governors in the larger towns; but vast areas of the province were under no central control. It even included a self-contained kingdom, called Derge, which was almost autonomous; and in the southeast, not far from the Upper Yangtze, the Pangda brothers ruled as kings from their mountain stronghold of Po, near the town of Batang. It was said that they could mobilize a force of several thousand Khambas in a few days.

Since the fall of Chungking Sikang had been virtually free from Chinese control. Some of the Chinese local governors had declared for the Communists, others had fled; there was no effective rule by Peking. In the Po district the Pangda

brothers ruled unchallenged. Farther north, the Communist Army was advancing along the narrow, difficult trade route to Tibet. The Communists did not know the country, and there were no reliable maps. As their line of communication lengthened they became mortally vulnerable to guerrilla attacks. If Pangda Topgye gave the word . . .

"Pangda Topgye," said Khenchi Dawala, "will demand his price."

His price would be some sort of autonomy for Kham—on both sides of the river. Topgye and Rapga were Khamba nationalists, loyal to the Dalai Lama but ambitious to rule their own people without interference from the Lhasa government.

I wondered if the price was too high; or if the Lhasa government could afford not to pay.

On our side of the river Lhalu decided to recruit Khambas for an auxiliary corps.

Not all the Lhasa officials were happy about this. Some had made themselves unpopular by squeezing too hard, and they feared that they might be forging a weapon that could be turned against them. But Lhalu's own prestige among the Khambas was high. He had proved a lenient Chief Magistrate, imposing reasonable fines and punishing by ridicule rather than by amputations and public floggings. The range of penalties was limited in the absence of prisons.

Lhalu had also shown some interest in the welfare of the people. He had built a water conduit from the river, and had even asked me if the waters of the Mekong could be harnessed to a hydroelectric station like the one in Lhasa. He was possibly the first Governor General of Kham who wanted to leave Chamdo a better place than he had found it.

The Governor General's word was law, and his order was

obeyed; but it was Khenchi Dawala who saw that it was properly enforced. He spoke as a Khamba and used all his prestige to bring men in from the outlying villages. Their first parade was a heartening sight. There were no uniforms for them, and they brought their own arms. Every Khamba carried a rifle on his shoulder, and a long sword at his waist; for this was the bandit country. In other parts of Tibet the word Khamba was synonymous with robber, and with good reason; for when a Khamba went out of his own territory he usually went to rob. They looked like bandits as they walked about in their swaggering, swashbuckling style.

Lhakpa the trader was typical. He lived in a village about two miles downstream, and he had invited me to his home several times. He was rich enough to have built a house of rammed earth. It was warmer than wattle-and-daub, but more easily burgled. The thief simply cut a hole in the wall. Lhakpa showed me where one had tried to get into his house.

"Did you catch him?" I asked.

Lhakpa laughed.

"I caught him in my sleep," he said.

Like all Khambas, Lhakpa always kept his right hand on the hilt of his sword. Now he explained that he slept with his sword by his side.

"And what did you do?"

There was a flash of steel as Lhakpa unsheathed his sword and brought it down a few inches from my ear.

"No more robbers have come here," he said.

Lhakpa was an authority on robbers and bandits, and knew more than anyone about their hideouts and customs. I often wondered how he had got the capital to start up in trade.

Dimön Depön was nominally responsible for training the Khambas, but there was not much he or the *rupöns* could do with them. They were hopeless at forming fours, and such

good shots that target practice was really a waste of ammunition. They wasted some more in the late afternoons, when they livened up Chamdo by riding round the town firing shots into the air, flourishing their swords, and letting out bloodcurdling screams. The girls were kept indoors, and some of the Lhasa officials also kept out of the way.

They would obviously not be a disciplined force like the regular troops, but as irregulars and in hand-to-hand combat they could be invaluable. Of course there was some friction between the regulars and the Khambas, who were put in a separate camp; and one day it came to a head. It was the usual cause. One of the regular soldiers had taken liberties with a Khamba girl.

It could have happened anywhere. It did happen in England during the war, when American and other Allied troops went out with English girls. We also had our squabbles and a few fights. It was never worse than that, because we had military police. There was no military police in Tibet, and what began as a personal quarrel looked as if it might develop into a minor civil war.

By the time I heard about it the Khamba levies were massing outside the regular troops' barracks, waving their swords and taunting the soldiers to come out. Dimön Depön was not there, and the *rapöns* ordered their troops to fix bayonets. A fight looked certain when Khenchi Dawala appeared.

He rode up unarmed, and the Khambas fell silent and made way.

"Who will win if we fight each other?" he asked. "I shall tell you—only the Chinese. Go back to your camp. Do not be impatient—you will have some fighting soon."

Without a murmur the Khambas sheathed their swords and went.

Khenchi Dawala's promise of fighting was more soundly

based than they knew. He had come from the government offices, where mounted messengers had just brought the news that the Chinese were only one day's march from the river.

During the last few days the radio traffic from Dengko had been very heavy. On the day after the brawl Sonam Puntso told me he had an urgent message as soon as he came on the air. He began to tap it out, but he did not finish. Suddenly he broke off, and telegraphed in clear:

“The Chinese are here.”

Then there was silence. Dengko radio had closed down for good.

4

Arms and the Monks

I TOLD WANGDA TO KEEP ON CALLING DENGKO, AND RODE TO THE Residency to report the news. Lhalu looked grave but gave no sign of alarm. He murmured a brief prayer and then went into action.

He summoned his senior secretary and immediately dictated a message to Muja Depön, who commanded five hundred men at a garrison town on the Tsinghai frontier, five days' march northwest of Chamdo.

"Bring your troops at once," he told Muja. Then he dismissed the secretary, and a few minutes later I heard a messenger ride away.

Next he summoned Dimön Depön and told him to send scouts to Dengko at once. They were to ride day and night.

"Unless we retake Denkgo we cannot stay in Chamdo," Lhalu told me. "But do not worry. According to my information the Chinese force cannot be very large. That is why we must wipe it out before it can be reinforced."

Here was Lhalu the man of action—cool, practical, decisive, and completely unafraid. I could hardly recognize the man who had told me how the gods had saved his life.

"I suppose you want me to keep this secret, Your Excellency," I said.

He smiled.

"You have been in Tibet long enough to know that secrets are hard to keep, Phodo," he said. "It will be all over the town in a few hours. Now I must see Shiwala Rimpoche. Every effort must be made to win the help of the gods."

That did not lessen my respect for Lhalu. I thought he had put first things first, and the gods would be powerful allies in keeping up morale.

As I rode back to the radio station I instinctively looked up at the hills, as if I expected to see Chinese troops appear. But I knew that even if Lhalu had misjudged their strength we were not in immediate danger. They were still over a hundred miles away, and it would take them a few days to reach Chamdo even if they were unopposed.

They were not going to be unopposed. Later that day detachments of regular troops set off up both the East and the West rivers. Guards were set on the bridges. The water was no longer frozen, and neither river was easy to ford.

The troops looked in good heart. The two *rupöns* organized their deployment, while Dimön Depön remained in nominal command. He also seemed to grow in stature now that the test had come. He might not be an efficient officer, but there was no doubting his courage.

The Khamba levies were held back until Muja arrived. They were to join him in the attack on Dengko.

Old Khenchi Dawala took charge of the fortifying of Chamdo.

I rode with him to the north side of the monastery, and he showed me where he had fought in 1917.

"We were the attackers then," he said, as he began living the battle over again. "The Chinese held the town and the

ruins of the monastery, which they had destroyed five years before. We fought our way up the hill, and that is how they will probably come now. Whoever holds the monastery holds the town."

Both attackers and defenders had fought behind stone *sangars*, or barricades, instead of trenches, and relics of these still lay on the hill.

"I had my men here," said Khenchi Dawala. "This is where we broke through: the Chinese had a *sangar* there, and we got round it on the far side. We must put up another *sangar* there to guard against that."

Under his directions fresh barricades were built from the ruins of the old. Chamdo was not going to be taken without a fight.

Lhalu asked me what I thought of the defenses of the town.

"Phodo, you have fought in a war," he said. "What else do you think I should do?"

"Put some Bren guns in the hills and dynamite at the bridges," I said.

"We have no dynamite."

No dynamite! No explosives of any kind!

"What will you do if you have to retreat and want to destroy arms and ammunition?" I asked.

"Break and burn. There is no other way."

But he put Bren guns behind Khenchi Dawala's *sangars*, and Chamdo was as much of a fortress as it was ever to be.

The news that the Chinese had crossed the river had spread as quickly as Lhalu expected, and Chamdo was busy strengthening its spiritual defenses. More prayer services were held in the monastery, more devils were cast out, more incense was burned, and the two *rimpoches* went into the mountains

to meditate and pray. Everyone prayed, both personally and by turning prayer wheels and putting out more prayer flags. They did not pray as we pray, asking God for specific favors. They had only one prayer, and it consisted of four words: *Om Mani Padme Hum*, meaning "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus"—that is, to the Buddha. It was inscribed in tiny Tibetan characters on every prayer flag and on pieces of daphne-bark paper which were packed tightly into prayer wheels. The gods were believed to be moved by the numbers of prayers they received, and during the next few days literally millions of prayers were sent up from Chamdo, by one means or another, into the upper air where the gods lived.

Not a moment was wasted, and Rimshi Trokao was murmuring the prayer very rapidly, over and over again, when he came into the radio station to ask me my transport requirements in the event of evacuation.

"This is only an emergency plan," he said. "I do not know what I shall be able to supply, for I need a great deal of transport for the attack on Dengko. But His Excellency has told me to prepare for evacuating government officials and troops and supplies in the event of a direct threat to cut the route to Lhasa."

I told him what I would need for my staff and myself and the radio equipment. He asked me to be ready to destroy what would have to be left behind.

Rimshi Trokao might not have known what *de facto* recognition meant or how air crews were trained, but I doubt if anyone was better equipped for the difficult task of collecting ponies and yaks and mules from the villages round Chamdo. He also gave me a feeling of confidence.

Of course the proper strategy would have been to evacuate Chamdo at once—to move the headquarters of the Eastern Command farther west, where it could not be by-passed,

and to leave only a detachment to protect Chamdo. It was obvious that if the Chinese succeeded in breaking through as far as Chamdo they would easily be able to go round it on the north and cut the Lhasa route. Small mobile bands of irregulars would be invaluable behind the enemy lines, but the only sensible way to fight in this war was for the main force to retreat on Lhasa.

The obvious place for Eastern H.Q. was Lho Dzong, several days' march to the west, which guarded the only bridge across the wide, swift-flowing River Salween. It could not be outflanked; and from Lho Dzong to Lhasa the country was wild and rugged, with an average elevation of 12,000 feet and passes of up to 17,100 feet, snowbound for most of the year.

I had not come by this track, simply because it was considered too difficult for a caravan loaded with equipment like mine. It would be much more difficult for an army to force. I had gone to Chamdo by a longer route, traveling first northward to Nagchu and then westward through the border region between Tibet and Tsinghai. This was the only alternative route to Lhasa from the east or north. It was less difficult, but still highly favorable to defense.

"We cannot leave Chamdo yet," said Lhalu. "If we did we should lose the support of all the Khambas, in both Tibet and Sikang. We should be leaving their largest monastery to the mercy of the godless Chinese, and they would feel they had been betrayed. Our levies would melt away, and perhaps even turn against us. Pangda Topgye would come to terms with the Chinese."

Of course he was right. It might seem military suicide, but politically there was no other course.

"You must remember," Lhalu went on, "that until the Chinese captured it forty years ago Chamdo was the capital

of a semi-independent state. Lhasa troops helped to drive the Chinese out ten years later, and the people wanted us to stay to protect them from the Chinese. That is all we have to offer them in return for the taxes they pay. If we run away without a fight they will never want us back."

But Lhalu was a realist. He knew that the longer he stayed in Chamdo, the more favorably impressed the Khambas would be. He did not think they would expect the Lhasa troops to stay and fight to the last man when by retreating they could live to fight another day.

The plan, therefore, was to hold Chamdo until the track to Lhasa was almost within the reach of the Chinese. Then we would evacuate and, if necessary, fight our way out. As the first Chinese troops to reach the road would probably be only an advance party it should thus be possible to escape military defeat without the sacrifice of political expedience. It was risky, but it could be done. Its success depended primarily on keeping the track open as long as possible and on obtaining quick and accurate information about the movements of the Chinese.

"I have sent reinforcements to Riwoche," said Lhalu.

Riwoche was the key. To cut the track from the north the Chinese would almost certainly have to come down from Jyekundo, in Tsinghai. From there only Riwoche stood between them and our life line to Lhasa.

I had passed through Riwoche on my way to Chamdo.

It was the prettiest little town I saw in Kham. Situated on a tributary of the Upper Salween, it was well wooded and wonderfully green—as, perhaps, Chamdo had been before deforestation and soil erosion ruined it. It had a population of about five hundred, and three monasteries full of monks. There was a caravan track northward to Jyekundo, and it

would need skillful defense. It was not likely to get it so long as Changra Depön was in command.

He was one of the poorest types of officer produced by the Tibetan social system. He was a playboy, well suited to party life in Lhasa and entirely out of his element in Kham. He had come for what he could make out of it, and did not even pretend to show any interest in his troops. He was the exact opposite of Muja Depön, whom I had also met on my journey. He made even Dimön Depön seem a good leader of men.

It was at Riwoche that I saw the miracle performed by an incarnate lama. He had gone for a walk outside one of the monasteries, and left the imprint of his foot on a stone. I was given the great honor of being allowed to hold it, and Tashi and Lobsang were thrilled and ecstatic. I was introduced to the incarnate lama, and felt somewhat embarrassed. It seemed out of order to congratulate a lama on a miracle, yet it might be thought rude if I ignored it. So I just bowed and said I had seen the stone, and then looked rather silly. He returned my bow and looked modest.

The District Governor's wife was most excited about it, for she had been one of the first to see the stone. Later she said she had actually seen the miracle performed. I arranged for her to speak by radio to her parents in Lhasa, and she was grateful but too preoccupied to be impressed by my little conjuring tricks although she had never seen a radio before. I had the same experience throughout the journey. People were intrigued, and looked for the man in the box, but I was never credited with any magical powers. This made me skeptical about those travelers' tales of Europeans who were acclaimed as white magicians or even gods when they demonstrated a few scientific toys to remote peoples with religions of their own. Belief in miracles does not seem to need or even spring from apparent physical evidence.

Lhalu was deeply impressed when I told him about the miracle.

"That is very auspicious," he said. "It surely means that the gods are looking after Riwoche." But he still sent reinforcements.

I wished he would relieve Changra Depön of his command, but it would have been impertinent to say so. Instead, I pointed out that it would be an advantage to have a radio station at Riwoche. As long as we had to rely on messengers, if the town fell while we were in Chamdo the Chinese would have cut the Lhasa route before we heard the news.

Four days after Dengko radio went off the air the scouts returned from their ride of two hundred and twenty miles.

Their news reassured us about the strength of the Chinese but was depressing for me. They said the radio equipment had been taken across the river, but they could get no news of the Indians or Lobsang and his family.

Three days later Lobsang appeared. His escape story was good.

"I looked out of the window in the radio station," he said, "and there they were. Hundreds of them, pouring into the courtyard. I told Sonam Puntso, who was on the key, but he went on tapping, and that's why he was caught. They had already got Sonam Dorje on the way in. I hid in a cupboard, and they never looked in. Then at night I crept out, and ran away."

He stopped as if he had finished his story.

"You didn't run all the way to Chamdo," I said.

"No, I went to my house to get my pony."

"What about your wife and children?"

"They were inside. Chinese soldiers were patrolling outside, and we waited till they passed. Then we came away."

"Who did?"

"My wife and myself and our children and my servant and a porter to carry the little one."

It was fantastic. Although only a junior official, Lobsang was well worth catching; yet he had escaped under the noses of the Chinese, with his whole household, including a three-year-old child swaddled up on a porter's back.

"Didn't you bring your household goods?" I asked.

"No," he said sadly, "we had no transport for them."

But I did not feel like joking. Perhaps Lobsang was right, and Sonam Puntso would have escaped too if he had not stayed to warn me that the Chinese had arrived. At any rate, both he and Sonam Dorje were prisoners now, and I felt responsible. I comforted myself with the thought that the Chinese would soon realize that they were harmless and knew nothing of military value, and would soon send them back to India, where they had originally come from. I did not know the Communists then, which was just as well for my peace of mind.

Lhalu told me to ask Wangda and Dronyer how they felt now about taking radio stations out. As we had only one working set there was no question of anyone going yet, of course, but Lhalu had asked Lhasa for more equipment and also some of the operators Fox had trained. He said he was going to send stations to Dengko, Riwoche, and Gangto Druga, in the east. If he could get a fourth he would send it to Markham Gartok, southeast of Chamdo.

Both Dronyer and Wangda were still ready to go. So was Tsering.

I spoke to Tashi and Lobsang again about sending their wives and children back to Lhasa. They promised to think about it, but I could see they thought the suggestion odd.

All the other Lhasa officials still had their wives with them. Lhalu had his wife, who was nursing a baby a few months old. It is true that it was quite a big thing to organize a caravan to Lhasa, and women and children could not travel alone for fear of bandits. But it was never even suggested that they should go.

"One thing, Phodo Kusho," said Lobsang. "I shall never start a journey on an inauspicious day again."

"You think you didn't fool the evil spirits, then?"

"I think I shall never hear the last of it from my wife."

Ten days after the fall of Dengko Muja Depön arrived.

He left most of his troops camped outside Chamdo, and stayed the night in one of the ground-floor rooms of my house. These rooms were normally used to accommodate visiting officials. I was glad to see Muja again and to invite him in for biscuits and butter tea.

On my journey from Nagchu to Chamdo I had passed through all the garrison towns protecting Tibet from Tsinghai. There were not many, and in most the troops looked idle and bored. Muja's were the exception. They were smart and well disciplined and looked like soldiers. He kept them busy and organized regular exercises, and every man under him knew the country all round.

Muja himself was a real soldier, not just an official in uniform. He was about forty-five, and had been a *depön* for several years; and he took his duties seriously. He was brisk, energetic, and confident, although very much alive to the dangers of the situation. He was also one of the very few *depöns* who could command the respect of the Khamba levies. Although a Lhasa noble himself, he was a little like them in his carefree, swashbuckling way. I told him I thought he must have been a Khamba in one of his previous existences.

"They're fine people," he said. "And they'll make fine troops."

They certainly looked pretty fearsome when they went on parade, and were issued with amulets blessed by the *rim-poches* to wear round their necks. Khenchi Dawala gave them a pep talk, reminding them that the Chinese were godless and wanted to destroy their religion. Then Muja took over. His own men were models of smartness, but he realized that the Khambas were not the right sort for spit-and-polish. He took them as he found them, and they took him as a man after their own heart.

Two hundred Khambas went with Muja, bringing his total force to seven hundred. According to the latest reports from Dengko, the Tibetan force would be slightly superior in numbers, although the Chinese could still be reinforced before the attack was made.

Rimshi Trokao produced all the transport required. With Muja at their head, the troops rode off.

Tharchi Tsendron came to see me about radio security. In addition to his other duties Lhalu had appointed him Security Officer for Chamdo.

"His Excellency says there must be no more telephone conversations," he said.

I was very pleased to hear it. When traders came to talk to Lhasa they usually brought their wives and children and friends, and they all wanted to crowd into the radio room to watch and listen. Moreover, it was almost impossible to get them to come on time. Clocks and watches were almost unknown in Chamdo.

Naturally conversations had to be booked and arranged in advance, so that the other speaker in Lhasa arrived at Fox's station at the same time. There were not many clocks or watches there either, so to bring them together was always

difficult. The only means I had of telling them when to come was to advise them to be at the station when the sun was over the peak of a particular mountain—and this was no good when the sky was overcast. Often they came too early, and then I had them and their whole retinues hanging about outside.

“His Excellency also wants you to check all messages in the commercial code,” said Tharchi Tsendron.

Tibetan cannot be put straight into Morse because there are thirty-six letters in the alphabet. Therefore, when the service was started each Tibetan letter was assigned a two-figure number, and copies of this letter-number code were printed and put on public sale. There was also a copy in the radio station, and we made it a rule that anyone wanting to send a radio telegram should turn it into numbers before he handed it in. Similarly the message was delivered in numbers at the other end, and the recipient had to turn it back into letters.

I told Tashi and Lobsang to check the incoming telegrams, and they soon found that some turned out to be simply a collection of letters that did not make any obvious sense. Clearly secret codes were being used. Tharchi Tsendron investigated, and the reason was not so sinister as it seemed. Some of the traders, fearing their messages might be intercepted by business rivals, had made up codes of their own.

I told these traders that they had no need to worry, as no one outside the radio service was capable of receiving Morse.

“We know that,” said one trader guilelessly. “It is your staff that we are worried about. Surely they trade too?”

Lhalu summoned me to the Residency with a message asking me to bring my maps.

They were Government of India survey maps, over thirty

years old and not very accurate: I had been able to make some corrections on my journey from Lhasa to Chamdo. But they were the only maps of Tibet that had ever been made.

The Tibetan Army had no maps, but relied entirely on local knowledge. A Tibetan map had been made of the track from Lhasa to Chamdo, and Lhalu had brought a copy: it could not have helped him much, for it showed the route in a straight line. He also had a hand-drawn map of Kham, copied from a Government of India map, but with the place names in Tibetan instead of English. This was useful, but it was on a much smaller scale than mine.

"I have been thinking about how you will get out of the country if we are cut off by the Chinese, Phodo," said Lhalu.

I had been thinking about it too. There was a route to the south which led to Assam, and if we were unable to get through to Lhasa I intended to ask Lhalu to let me and the Indians make our own way out. Of course it was understood that if the track to Lhasa was still open, or if we had a chance of fighting our way through, we would go with the other officials, taking our remaining portable radio.

Earlier in the year some American missionaries who had been in Batang had been given permission by the Tibetan government to cross the Upper Yangtze and go to Assam. Similar permission had been given to a Scottish missionary, George Patterson, who had been with the Pangda brothers at Po. They had all made the journey safely.

"I shan't take this route unless there is no other way," I said, after we had gone over the route on my map.

"I appreciate that," said Lhalu quietly. "Of course you know that you can leave the country now if you like."

My contract had expired four days before Dengko fell, and the new one had not yet come from Lhasa for me to sign.

"Thank you, Your Excellency," I said. "I am very willing to continue to serve under the terms of the old contract until the new one is signed."

Lhalu did not ask me to put this in writing. There was a mutual trust between us, and I respected him more than ever for giving me the chance to leave honorably, at least in a technical sense, when I was probably needed more than ever before.

Lhalu had another bright idea. He wanted to arm five hundred of the monks.

Taking life, human or animal, is strictly forbidden by the Buddhist religion; but, as in most religions, precept and practice do not always coincide. The monks ate yak meat, and monks had taken up arms in the past. Only three years earlier an incarnate lama had tried to murder the Regent—not by witchcraft but with a time bomb—and a whole monastery had supported his cause. The post of Commander in Chief of the Tibetan Army was held in duplicate, and the monk C. in C. was the senior of the two. That valiant old warrior Khenchi Dawala was a monk.

Khenchi Dawala thought it was a good idea. He took out his old Khamba sword, which he kept in a gold and silver scabbard studded with turquoise and coral, and said he was willing to fight too.

"Of course monks should fight," he said. "It's our war more than anyone's. The Chinese do not seek merely to take our country—they want to destroy our religion. The last time they came to Chamdo they destroyed our monastery. We built a new one—and if they come again they will destroy it like the last one. These Communists are even worse than Butcher Chao [a notorious Chinese commissioner who killed thousands of Khambas]; they boast that they have no gods.

If we let them come they will destroy every monastery in Tibet. They will probably kill all the monks, too," he added warningly.

In spite of Khenchi Dawala's eloquence, the monks did not like Lhalu's idea. Nor did Dimön Depön, although he did not dare say so; when Lhalu had an idea every official had to pretend to support it, for he was the Governor General.

The monks agreed that the Chinese had to be beaten, and they were very willing to play their part too. But they said that only the gods could give Tibet victory—this argument was unanswerable—and they were doing their bit by praying. They would pray twice as hard, or rather twice as often, and that would be more use than taking up arms. If they were to spend even part of their time as soldiers thousands of prayers would be lost.

Lhalu consulted Shiwala Rimpoche, who also thought the monks should be armed but suggested he should seek spiritual advice. At one time this would have involved a journey to Lhasa, but now he could do it by radio telephone. I was told that Lhalu and Shiwala Rimpoche were coming to the radio station to speak to Trijang Rimpoche, Spiritual Adviser to the Dalai Lama.

I had to arrange this carefully with Fox. Obviously Trijang Rimpoche must not be kept waiting in Fox's studio; on the other hand it would be improper for Lhalu to be subjected to a long delay. So it was carefully timed, and at the appointed hour Shiwala Rimpoche rode up to the radio station. Shortly afterward Tenné ran up to say that the Governor General was arriving. Shiwala and I both went down to meet him.

Lhalu had been to the radio station before, to speak to his mother in Lhasa; but until we had sent the second radio to Dengko I had usually taken it to the Residency so that he

could speak from there. This saved all the ceremonial that was obligatory for a visit by the Governor General.

He was preceded as usual by his equerry, standard-bearer, steward, and servants. His trumpeters played a fanfare, and troops of his personal bodyguard presented arms as he rode into the courtyard and was helped to dismount. We escorted him upstairs, and he sat in the seat of honor. On occasions like this our relationship was purely formal.

We had timed it correctly, and in a few minutes Fox told me that Trijang Rimpoche had arrived in his studio. I asked Lhalu to speak, and he approached the microphone reverently and placed a ceremonial white scarf and a package of paper money on the table in front of it. Then he bowed his head as if to receive a blessing.

"What's holding you up, Bob?" Fox and I had separate microphones, and his voice sounded almost blasphemous.

"His Excellency is offering a white scarf and a present," I said in a hushed voice, feeling like a B.B.C. commentator in Westminster Abbey. "His Excellency is awaiting Trijang Rimpoche's blessing."

"Trijang Rimpoche accepts the white scarf and the present," Fox replied after a few moments, also almost intoning the words. "He is giving Lhalu Shapé his blessing."

When I had translated, Lhalu came away from the microphone, and Shiwala Rimpoche went through the same procedure. It was his first visit to the radio station, and he seemed to be in some doubt whether to offer his scarf and present to the microphone or the loud-speaker; but Lhalu had set the precedent, and a new addition was made to Tibetan radio protocol.

Trijang Rimpoche had been Shiwala's own tutor, and there was affection as well as reverence in Shiwala's voice. Finally he asked the question about the monks.

Of course he did not ask bluntly whether or not they should be armed, for security had to be observed. The interview had been arranged beforehand by messages in the government code, and both the question and answer were put in a form that made them sound innocent to anyone who was eavesdropping. Shiwala simply asked what the monks should do in the present religious crisis, and Trijang said they should pray harder and also obey the wishes of the Governor General. The meaning was that they should be armed.

But before anything more could be done about it messengers from Muja rode in with the news that Dengko had been recaptured and all the Chinese there killed.

5

Two Britons in Kham

“DIDN’T YOU TAKE ANY PRISONERS?”

Lhakpa, the trader turned soldier, stared as if he did not know what I meant.

“Prisoners?” he repeated. “What would we do with prisoners? Where would we keep them? Who would feed them?”

“But didn’t some of them surrender?”

“We never gave them the chance.” The Khamba was telling me the story in the radio station, standing with legs apart and his hand still on the hilt of his sword. “A few of them jumped into the river and were drowned. As for the rest—”

His sword was unsheathed in a flash, and I felt the wind as it whistled down about an inch from my car. I flinched, and Lhakpa laughed. Khambas have a great sense of humor.

From other reports I learned that it had not been quite so easy as that. Muja had sent scouts forward first, and then attacked with his regular troops, holding the Khamba levies in reserve. There had been some hard fighting, and one of his *rupöns* and several men were killed. But the Chinese were already hard pressed when Muja called in the Khambas for hand-to-hand fighting, and then it was soon over. I learned

also that Muja was not at all pleased by the complete absence of prisoners. He had hoped to get some information.

I thought that perhaps it was just as well that Sonam Puntso and Sonam Dorje had been taken by Chinese rather than Khambas.

Neither Radio Peking nor Radio Lhasa reported the fall or recapture of Dengko. Not a word about the incident ever reached the international press. China did not want to advertise her aggression or defeat. Tibet still hoped for peace. About a month later I heard All-India Radio from Delhi broadcast an unconfirmed report that Chinese troops had entered Tibet, but this was neither confirmed nor denied by either Lhasa or Peking.

Muja stayed at Dengko, and most of the Khamba levies remained with him. Their success stimulated recruiting, and Lhalu abandoned his plan to arm the monks. The Khambas were obviously more useful, and now they were issued Army rifles so that they could use the standardized ammunition.

Reinforcements of Lhasa troops continued to trickle in, and Lhalu sent some of these to Riwoche. The immediate threat had passed, but the danger that Chamdo would be by-passed increased daily. The Chinese did not need Dengko in order to reach Jyekundo. They could continue to march to the northwest by the caravan track on the other side of the Upper Yangtze. They could also come down Tsinghai from the north. I felt that we were sitting on a barrel of gunpowder that might explode at any time.

I spoke to Lhalu about medical supplies. I pointed out that if there was fighting, at least some wounded soldiers could be made fit for duty again if only we had dressings and bandages, which could be bought cheaply in India. He promised to ask the Lhasa government to send some, but he was not very hopeful about it. There was no allowance for

medical supplies in the Army budget. Meanwhile I received some bandages and iodine from the last remaining European missionary in Sikang, an Englishman named Geoffrey Bull.

Bull has told his story in a fine and moving book, *When Iron Gates Yield*. He went to China with Patterson, and, like all missionaries, they wanted to enter Tibet. Of course the Lhasa government would not let them in. The nearest they could come was Sikang; and at Kangting, the capital of the province, they met the Pangda brothers, who invited them to their mountain stronghold at Po. This brought them to within a few days' march of the Upper Yangtze and, therefore, of Tibet.

Patterson had left for Assam in January, to get fresh medical supplies. In the following month Bull received permission from the Lhasa government to follow the same route through southeastern Tibet. Both his application and the reply came through Chamdo, and I had translated his letter to Lhalu. By then he had heard of me, and sent a personal letter to me with it. I was thrilled to hear from a fellow Briton in the same part of the world. Although not in Tibet, Bull was actually nearer to me than Fox.

In spite of the situation Bull decided to stay in Po; and at the end of March he went to help a small group of Chinese evangelists in Batang, three days' march northeast of Po. He found the town virtually without any civil government, but with local Communists more or less in control. They had insulted and assaulted the American missionaries before they left. Their power was limited, however, and they were biding their time until the People's Liberation Army arrived. Bull and his Chinese co-workers bravely established themselves in the old Mission House and held services in Tibetan and Chinese.

I had little chance to communicate directly with Bull, but I heard news of him from the Governor of Markham Gartok, some eighty miles southeast of Chamdo and facing Batang and Po across the Upper Yangtze. The Governor's name was Derge Sé, meaning the Prince of Derge, the self-contained kingdom in northern Sikang. Derge Sé was exiled from his kingdom, which was ruled by his mother, and in Tibetan service he held the rank of *depön*. He had written to me soon after I arrived in Chamdo—in English.

He had told me he had met the two Americans who had explored Tibet for a supply line to China during the war, and he hoped he would meet me soon. He invited me to stay with him at Markham Gartok. Meanwhile he asked me to correct his letters and send them back, as he wanted to improve his English. When I replied I sent him books and magazines, and afterward we corresponded regularly.

Derge Sé had learned English in Tibet. He had been a pupil at an English school run by Frank Ludlow at Gyantse, between Lhasa and Sikkim. The school had been opened in 1923 and lasted for two years; then Tibetan foreign policy took a turn toward closer co-operation with China, and the school was closed down. Twenty years later, when the policy had changed again, Ludlow was in charge of the British Mission in Lhasa.

I was never able to meet Derge Sé, who was undoubtedly the most educated man in Kham. He was one of the very few of Ludlow's pupils who had kept up his English after the school closed, and by all accounts he was one of the most progressive officials in the country.

There was another of Ludlow's former pupils in Chamdo itself. His name was Horkhang Sé, and he was the lay Finance Minister. He had also been given English lessons by Mr.

Hugh Richardson, but he had almost forgotten the language when I arrived in Chamdo.

(I had met two of Horkhang Sé's aunts in Lhasa, and come across a complicated matrimonial situation that was unusual even in Tibet. When his father died his mother married Tsarong Dzasa, an elder statesman who was reputed to be the richest man in Tibet. When she died Tsarong married her sister, Horkhang's elder aunt. Tsarong also had a daughter by the third sister, who was educated in India, where she acquired the name of Mary. Their child was called Betty. Mary married an official named Jigme Tering. Her daughter Betty married Jigme's younger brother, George. So Mary was now George's sister-in-law and mother-in-law combined.)

I had to go to the Finance Office in Chamdo to hand over the money taken at the radio station for private telegrams and telephone calls. Lobsang and Tashi kept the books, and every telegram and call was recorded and backed with a receipt with a canceled stamp. After I had been there six months I took the money with the books and receipts to Horkhang Sé.

Horkhang Sé stared at all this in amazement.

"You've gone to a lot of trouble," he said.

"It was no trouble," I told him. "Will you check the accounts?"

"I'll send for the counting machine," he said.

It was not a machine at all. It turned out to be a huge tray divided into compartments, which contained pieces of broken glass, pebbles, bits of pottery, dried berries, chips of wood, and other small articles that could be used as counters. These represented variously units, tens, hundreds, thousands, and so on—for Tibet was at least sufficiently advanced to have adopted the metric system. At the bottom of the tray was

a large empty compartment in which the sums were worked out.

The monk Finance Minister and all the clerks came to help Horkhang Sé. I was so interested that I did not notice at once that they had turned over two pages of the accounts together, and before I could point this out Horkhang Sé had finished the sums and announced that my figures were perfectly correct.

"But there's no need to go to so much trouble again," he said, as he certified the figures and gave me a receipt.

"It's only the totals that matter," added the monk Finance Minister, who had somehow managed to stay in Chamdo for ten years and was famous for his squeeze.

The Finance Office in Chamdo did not differ greatly from the government offices I had gone to in Lhasa. Official letters and other documents were filed in the same way as in the Foreign Office—tied in bundles and suspended down pillars and doorposts like a lot of prayer flags. This system was one reason for the frequent delays in my mail. No one could accuse Tibet of too much bureaucracy, and interdepartmental memos were not filed at all. They were "written" with bamboo pens on slates that had been surfaced with powdered chalk, the surplus chalk being scratched off as the clerk wrote. The slates had raised edges, so that they could be stacked together without the writing being rubbed off. The slates were the property of the office in which the memo originated, and therefore had to be returned when it had been read. That was why they were used. No record was kept, and no one could have his memoranda used in evidence against him.

I became quite friendly with Horkhang Sé, and he even offered to find me a temporary wife.

I was not far from getting one under my own steam.

Her name was Pema. She was about seventeen, perhaps less. I met her through her stepfather, a junior official named Khona.

It all began when I asked Lhalu if someone could monitor the news broadcasts from Peking in Chinese.

Preparing the daily news summary was taking up a great deal of my time, for I had to monitor all the main stations of the world that normally broadcast in English. Radio Peking was one of the most important, and I said I thought it would be better, besides reducing my work, if it was monitored in Chinese.

Lhalu agreed, and Khona was ordered to come to the radio station every day when the news in Chinese was broadcast from Peking.

He had learned Chinese in Nanking where he had worked in Tibetan service. His loyalty was above suspicion, for he hated the Chinese.

"They called us barbarians, and they treated me like an inferior," he said. "They were always boasting of their great culture, and they said we have none."

He was a small, quiet, mild-mannered man. Like many other Lhasa officials, when he came to Chamdo he took a temporary wife. She was a big, buxom Khamba, and he did what she said. The status of women was high in Tibet compared with other Asian countries, and henpecked husbands were not uncommon. But Pema was kind to her stepfather, and seemed sorry for him. She was a very pretty girl. I found she was also a flirt.

I sat next to her at a party at Khona's house. Our conversation was on international lines.

"Are you married?" she asked.

"No."

"Have you a sweetheart?"

"No."

"What do you think of Khamba girls?"

"I think they are very beautiful."

I did, too, as I looked at her rosy-cheeked oval face, full lips, and clear black almond eyes. Her lips smiled invitingly, her eyes flashed, and she stroked her cheek.

This gesture had a precise meaning. There was a prescribed etiquette in flirting, as in everything else in Tibet. Young couples did not begin by holding hands. Instead, when the man caught the girl's eye he pulled the lobe of his ear, or, if he was a Khamba, and therefore did not wear his hair in a topknot, rubbed the crown of his head. If the girl returned his interest she stroked her cheek. If she was not interested she gave him the universal brush-off of looking away and raising her chin. I was sure I had not touched my ear or the crown of my head, and Pema was being very forward indeed.

Her stepfather, who happened to be looking our way, frowned and suggested some Khamba dancing.

The Khambas are famous for their dances all over Tibet. I had already got the rough idea, and joined the circle. Pema was beside me.

The dance always began slowly, and we walked round, singing. Soon it livened up, and finally it became boisterous. We sang furiously, stamped our feet, and rushed round the room. Sometimes the circle broke, but Pema held my hand very tight.

"Do you like Khamba dancing?" she asked afterward.

"Yes, very much."

"Come here one afternoon, and I will teach you all the steps."

I did not dare look at her, for I was very conscious that Khona had his eyes on us.

He was having a bad time. His temporary wife was per-

manently occupied with another Lhasa official, of a rank higher than himself. His stepdaughter seemed equally interested in me. I felt embarrassed when I said good-by, and apprehensive when he came to the radio station the next day. But he was very friendly, and a few weeks later he invited me to another party.

I was more apprehensive than ever, although I had not seen Pema since the previous party. But I need not have worried. Khona's temporary wife was not there—I learned later that she had gone to live with the more senior official. Pema was our hostess.

"You know Pema, my wife," Khona said by way of introduction.

She smiled at me demurely. I had lost my chance.

I had other chances, and I was regarded as unconventional in remaining celibate. By our standards sexual morality in Tibet was lax, and it was even laxer in Chamdo than in Lhasa. No doubt this was due partly to the widespread practice of Lhasa officials, and of the troops, of taking temporary wives. But I suppose this was inevitable in a country where both polygamy and polyandry were allowed.

Polygamy was obvious, for a quarter of the males were monks. Polyandry was usually a matter of keeping a family estate in one piece. A woman could be required to marry all her husband's younger brothers. No complications about paternity arose from such unions, as the offspring were the legal children of the first husband, his brothers being only uncles. It was for reasons of inheritance, too, that in polygamous unions the wives were often sisters.

In Lhasa I knew one high-ranking official whose son had a one-third share in his stepmother. She was a commoner, and already had a husband when the official married her. He did not want to leave her all his money, so he brought

in his son as third husband. In another case it was the bride who demanded the hand of her husband's son, making it a condition of the marriage. She was very rich and brought a large dowry, and did not want to risk losing it all when her husband died. The son was already engaged to another girl, but for his father's sake he broke it off and agreed to acquire a wife and stepmother simultaneously.

This does not mean that Tibetans commonly practiced free love or that their women were "easier" than ours. Tibetans showed the normal human instincts, including jealousy and possessiveness. The girls expected to be courted, and Pema was exceptionally forward in taking the initiative with me. Their clothes were much less provocative than those of European women, completely concealing the figure. And the old story that hospitable Tibetans offered their wives or daughters to overnight guests was not borne out by my experience.

Whatever my moral outlook might have been, there were sound practical reasons for my keeping celibate. Although the other officials teased me and incited me to take a temporary wife, I think they respected me more because I did not. I think there would have been resentment if I had; for I was a foreigner, after all. It would have been different if I had married a Tibetan girl, as Fox did; but by then he had already decided to make Tibet his home for life. I intended to return to England, and it would have been cruel to take a Khamba girl with me. I was therefore careful to avoid possible emotional entanglements.

There were other reasons for remaining chaste. One was the tremendous incidence of venereal disease. It was rife all over Tibet, and especially bad in Kham. Medical ignorance and lack of hygiene were such that only the climate saved the country from epidemic disease, and it did not prevent the spread of syphilis and gonorrhoea. Men and women in

various stages came to me for treatment, and there was nothing I could do. It was utterly depressing to have to turn away afflicted babies. I tried to disseminate some knowledge, and discovered that most of the Khambas did not know how the disease was spread. They had been brought up to believe that all sickness was caused by evil spirits, and it was impossible to teach them the germ theory of disease. They were so uninformed that they still thought the earth was flat.

Horkhang Sé knew the facts of life, and repeatedly offered to find me a girl who was clean. But there were other deterrents besides that.

One was that the Khambas did not bathe and rarely washed their bodies. One might have got used to that, but I could never stomach their sanitary habits. They squatted down whenever they felt the need. In Lhasa they used the open drains, and I shall never forget the first time a girl I was walking along with suddenly broke off our conversation, went to the side of the road, and then came back and carried on talking as if nothing had happened. To Tibetans such matters are no more offensive than blowing one's nose. Esthetically I suppose they are right, for the Tibetan robe conceals everything. But I never felt the same about Pema after seeing her squatting on the embankment that was commonly used for this purpose in Chamdo.

The rain was late in coming, and that was an inauspicious sign. Special prayers were said, and services were held by experienced rain-bringing monks. A little temple by the river was kept specially for this purpose. In the town Lhalu issued the usual order to the people to water the streets. Buckets were brought up from the river, and some of the officials' wives kept a full one handy to empty on me when I rode past their houses. All building was forbidden: a per-

son building a house was bound to pray for dry weather, and his prayers would cancel out an equivalent number of the prayers for rain.

The rain came—and then there was hail. This was indeed a bad omen, and there were others too. The top of a famous stone monument in Lhasa crashed to the ground. The water in one of the holy lakes was seen to boil. Two-headed animals were born. One of Rimshi Trokao's ponies ate aconite and died, and even I had to admit that this was an exceptional event. There was some long grass behind our houses, where his ponies used to graze. On my arrival I had put mine there too, and he had warned me to take them away as there was aconite in the grass. His ponies avoided it because they were locally bred. But now it was a Khamba pony that ate the monkshood and died.

There was even more ominous news from Sikang. Communist troops were nearing Batang, and Bull had to return to Po. On his way he ran into an advance unit of the People's Liberation Army. It was going in the same direction, to try to persuade Pangda Topgye to come to terms with Peking. Bull was not scared. He still would not flee to Assam, but stayed in Po and even tried to convert the Communist officers to Christianity. He was a free-lance missionary, and could leave at any time: his courage was inspiring.

Radio reports from Delhi told me that the Tibetan delegation in India had still not made contact with the Chinese. It had refused repeated invitations to go to Peking, and insisted that negotiations should be carried out on neutral ground. The delegation now proposed a meeting in Hong Kong, and booked passages from Calcutta on an aircraft of B.O.A.C. But the British government refused them visas because of the "delicate situation" at Hong Kong, and the delegation returned to Delhi. The Indian government had

recently established diplomatic relations with Peking, and a new Chinese chargé d'affaires was expected in the Indian capital. The Tibetan delegation decided to try to negotiate with him when he arrived.

A fortnight later—on June 25—I heard the news that war had broken out in Korea.

I felt a new surge of hope when the United Nations at once went to South Korea's aid. The United Nations Organization was Tibet's best hope now that Britain had no further direct interest and India had shown she was not prepared to help on her own.

"It means that America and Britain and the other free nations are helping a small country against Communist attack," I told Rimshi Trokao when he asked me what the news meant. "Of course it is much easier for them to send troops to South Korea than it would be to Tibet. But even India is sending an ambulance unit, and she might be prepared to allow the passage of United Nations troops if she was sure they would win. It all depends on how quickly they drive the Communists out of South Korea."

My hopes began to fade when the North Koreans continued their advance, and it looked as if the United Nations forces might be thrown out altogether.

"How can we rely on foreign help now?" one of the less resolute of the Lhasa officials asked me. "If they cannot save the South Koreans from the North Koreans, what can they do for Tibet against China?"

I had no answer, for I was asking myself the same question. I had hoped for a quick victory that would show the readiness and strength of the United Nations and deter the Chinese from aggression. I still think that if this had happened Tibet could have saved her independence, and I might have been there today. I was not a complete fool to stay in the face of

the Chinese promises to "liberate" Tibet. Those who stayed on Formosa heard the same threats at the same time, and they are still there.

But in July something else happened that was to settle my fate. I could not know this then, but I had an uneasy premonition when Lhalu told me the news.

"Phodo," he said, "I am going to be relieved."

6

The Red Lama

THE NEWS THAT LHALU WAS GOING CAME TO ME AS A SHOCK. I had known that he was due to be relieved in July, when his three years' tour of duty expired. If times had been normal all the Lhasa officials would have gone then, except presumably the monk Finance Minister, who seemed to be immovable. Their reliefs should have been appointed in May. But the Lhasa government had told them that they would have to stay at their posts while the crisis lasted, and it was generally assumed that the most important official of all would also stay.

"It is a Cabinet decision," Lhalu told me.

I was sure he had not asked to be recalled. He may not have minded returning to Lhasa—the exile was worse for him than for any of the others—but I knew he was not the sort of man to run away from danger.

Lhalu said that apart from his personal staff—his equerry and secretaries—most of the other Lhasa officials would stay in Chamdo.

This was no consolation for me. All local decisions of importance were made by the Governor General alone, and his

Executive Council merely carried out his orders. He was too superior in rank to be able to ask other officials for their opinions, and none would dare give them unasked. I was the only person he could converse with naturally without loss of dignity.

The political folly of recalling Lhalu was not my business, but I feared it might affect me very much. Lhalu had been one of my reasons for deciding to renew my contract and stay in Tibet. This was not only a matter of personal affection: I had been impressed by his ability and especially his determination to resist the Chinese.

My new contract had not yet come from Lhasa, so technically I could still leave. My agreement to continue service under the terms of the old contract was only verbal, and a personal arrangement between me and Lhalu. The same applied to Lhalu's promise to inform me in advance if the Tibetan government should come to terms with the Chinese. In my mind the one was conditional on the other, and I decided to ask the new Governor General for a similar promise before I gave my word to stay. If the new contract arrived before he did I would have to ask Lhalu for a more official undertaking before I signed.

Meanwhile a Communist incarnate lama came to Chamdo, and I entertained him with tea.

His name was Geda, and he came from a monastery in Sikang. He came as the official representative of the Chinese Communist government, with instructions to go to Lhasa to negotiate with the Tibetan government.

On the face of it a lama could not be a Communist. Buddhism and Marxism are incompatible in every way. Even the idea of equality of opportunity is heresy to the Buddhist, as Tharchi Tsendron once explained to me.

"The law of Karma says that as you sow, so shall you reap," he said, "not only in this but in all future lives. A man who leads a pious life will be rewarded by rebirth in a higher station. A man who is wicked will be punished by rebirth in a lower station."

We were not talking about Communism. He was explaining to me why our ideas of social democracy could not be used in Tibet.

"Isn't there any envy or resentment against the position of the nobility?" I asked.

"Envy and resentment are wicked," he said. "Anyone who felt like that would suffer for it, for it could count against him in his next incarnation. But in fact we have more equality of opportunity than you. Anyone can be reborn in a higher station—indeed, he is bound to be—if he gains enough merit in this life."

But the greatest cause of opposition to Communism was that it was godless and even opposed to religion. A Communist cannot be a Buddhist any more than he can be a Christian.

But in Tibet, as in England, a few persons professed to be able to reconcile the two opposites; and in one respect a Tibetan Red lama was slightly less incongruous than an English Red dean. A Tibetan did not become an incarnate lama out of choice, he was discovered to be one while he was still a child. The monks also were entered into the church when they were boys, and not because they had felt a calling for the ministry as, presumably, an Englishman must have done to become a dean.

The Buddhist Church was reactionary, but it had also shown revolutionary tendencies in the past. This was because it ruled the country jointly with the two hundred noble families, the one serving to check and balance the other. The

ruling class was occasionally reinforced by the ennoblement of commoners, but the main check was the fact that any peasant's son could aspire to a political career by becoming a monk. Inevitably there was some friction between lay and monk officials, and therefore the principle of opposition to aristocratic government had a certain appeal to the monks.

It evidently appealed to Geda Lama, who had helped the Chinese Communists in the Civil War.

He came to Chamdo by the trade route from Sikang, and stayed in a house in the town while he waited for permission from the Tibetan government to go on to Lhasa. One day Horkhang Sé brought him to the radio station to hear the news from Peking.

He was an old man by Tibetan standards, probably about fifty. He was a typical Khamba in appearance, with a noticeably angular nose; but in manner he was mild and quiet and reserved. He seemed to be uneasy in my presence—but he took the opportunity to see all he could. He watched me closely when I tuned in the radio, and when he thought I was not looking at him his eyes darted round the room.

I gave him tea and cake, but did not try to make polite conversation. He was equally silent, and after he had heard the news he thanked me and left. He did not come to the radio station again. But I had not heard the last of Geda Lama.

Lobsang told me that Geda's steward had invited him to tea and tried to pump him about the radio station.

"I did not tell him anything, Phodo Kusho," he said.

"Good. Do you know if his servants have tried to get anything out of Tenné or Do-Tseten?"

"No, his servants are all girls."

"Girls?"

“Yes, Phodo Kusho. He came with just his steward and three Khamba girls. They go to his room in the evenings to sing to him.”

I repressed a desire to make a bawdy remark. Lobsang was no prude—none of the Tibetans I met were—but one did not make dirty jokes about an incarnate lama. Not even if he was a Communist working for the Chinese.

The attitude of the Tibetans to Geda Lama was interesting. Everyone knew what he was and why he had come to Chamdo, but he was treated with all the respect and reverence due to a lama. This was not just a matter of being polite. To the common people he was a spiritual leader in spite of his politics, and they regarded him as the protector of the religion which they believed his masters were trying to destroy. I do not think all the officials were so naïve, but it was made clear to me how easily the Communists could rule if they once gained control of the Church.

Geda's steward came once or twice to send telegrams to Lhasa. He handed them over in clear, and the clerks put them into the commercial code for him. They looked perfectly innocent. He also saw all he could of the radio station, and later he invited Tashi to his house and tried to pump him. Tashi was as reticent as Lobsang, and they both resisted the temptation to seek Geda Lama's blessing. Many people, including some of the Khamba levies, went to him to be blessed.

Geda himself went almost every day to the Residency, and once or twice I ran into him there. Lhalu did not mention his name to me, but from other officials I heard rumors that Geda had been refused permission to go to Lhasa. On his arrival the government radio traffic increased, but after about a week it was back to normal. Then Geda stopped going to see Lhalu. He still did not go back to Sikang, and as he

seemed to expect to stay some time in Chamdo he asked for a more suitable house.

He was given one of the rooms reserved for traveling officials on the ground floor of the old Summer Palace, directly under the radio station. I saw him arrive with his steward and the three Khamba girls. They were young and rosy-cheeked, and far too pretty for me to have allowed in my establishment. They did not look as if their presence would make celibacy easier, but perhaps Geda liked to prove his strength of character by rising above temptation. I did not hear them singing to him in his room.

But there was enough singing for me at the government summer parties.

These official parties were an annual institution, and they could not be canceled even by the threat of a war. It is true that Lhalu reduced the season from two weeks to one because of the situation, but what annoyed me was that during that week nearly everything came to a standstill. As a government official I was obliged to attend on at least two days myself. I did not mind, for I had no part in the anti-invasion preparations; but it was galling to see all those who were responsible feasting and enjoying themselves as if they had not a care in the world. This was even worse than the New Year celebrations, for there was not even a pretense of a religious sanction.

Lhalu had at least canceled the annual theater, as many of the parts were normally played by soldiers. I was relieved to see that military training was going on, and I doubted if it suffered much from the fact that Dimön Depön was too much occupied with the parties to take part.

It was now pleasantly warm during the day, and Tibet was not at all like the Roof of the World. There was no snow

except on the highest peaks. Because the air is dry and thin Tibet can be very hot as well as very cold, and sometimes the difference between day and night temperatures was as much as eighty degrees. The summer is short, but can be hot while it lasts, the temperature sometimes rising to ninety in the shade.

There was Khamba dancing on the lawn in front of the Residency, and Lhalu invited me to watch with him and his wife from his private room. Then we had a great feast, served in bowls of solid gold and silver and eaten with silver and ivory chopsticks. There were over twenty courses, including expensive Chinese delicacies like sea slugs and sharks' fins. In spite of the Communist march through Sikang there was little interruption to Sino-Tibetan trade.

The drink was *chang*, a rather flat and yeasty beer made from barley that looks like cloudy lemonade. It was served by two girls, specially chosen for their beauty, and magnificently dressed and bejeweled. One carried a huge solid silver bowl, chased with gold filigree, and the other a silver jug with a white scarf round the handle. They served us strictly in order of rank, and before drinking we went through the traditional ritual of offering *chang* to the gods. This was done by dipping the third finger of the right hand into the *chang* and flicking a few drops upward with the thumb. The third finger was considered the cleanest as it was said that babies are born with it in their nostrils.

Chang is not to be drunk like English beer, and I had learned in Lhasa that at big parties of this sort it was wise never to drink until you were forced—and not always then. As soon as a glass was half-empty the *chang* girls filled it up without asking, so I kept mine fairly full. Then they came up with beguiling smiles to coax me into drinking, and they were hard to resist. *Chang* girls were chosen for their powers of

persuasion as well as their beauty, and when all else failed they sometimes resorted to force. I have seen *chang* girls sticking pins into senior officials who drank too slowly. This was regarded as great fun, and it was reckoned bad manners to stay cold sober. A state of intoxication showed the host that the guest found his *chang* so good that he was unable to abstain. If a guest drank himself into such a stupor that he could not rise he was presented with a white scarf as a compliment.

The Lhalu brand of *chang* was one of the most famous in Tibet, and Lhalu had had barley sent specially so that it could be brewed in Chamdo. But it was for his guests, not for himself. He was a teetotaler. This did not stop him from encouraging his guests to get drunk, and he had the gift of being gay without needing alcoholic stimulation.

I saw Pema at the parties, still in the role of Khona's wife. Geda also attended, and was treated with the normal deference due to an incarnate lama. But he was quiet—monks were not allowed to drink alcohol—and none of the officials seemed to make any move to be friendly. Khenchi Dawala avoided him. I could imagine what he thought of a lama who was working for the Chinese.

In the middle of the party season another visitor came to Chamdo from Sikang. It was Rapga, the youngest of the Pangda Tsang brothers.

Pangda Rapga often came to the radio station to hear the news not only from Peking and Lhasa but also from Delhi, London, and New York. He could speak and read English, and knew far more about international affairs than any of the officials at Chamdo. He was easily the best-educated Khamba I met, but I could never make him out.

He was quiet and studious, and a keen Tibetan classical scholar; it was said that he knew more about the Buddhist

scriptures than most incarnate lamas. Yet in 1944 he had been expelled by the British from Kalimpong, in Bengal, after he had been found distributing bulletins decorated with the hammer and sickle. He had been running some sort of organization opposed to the Lhasa government, and was reported to have been getting money from the Chinese.

Bull, who knew him better than I did, says that both he and his brother were sincere Khamba nationalists, and there was no mystery about the reason for Rapga's visit to Chamdo. As he was still an outlaw he had demanded and received from the Lhasa government an assurance of safe conduct before crossing the border; and his purpose now was to try to negotiate a treaty with a view to establishing a common front against the Chinese. He and his brother were not prepared to give their services for nothing, but demanded a promise of some kind of autonomy for Kham. In return they would use their private army for guerrilla operations in Sikang.

Lhalu did not tell me of the negotiations that went on between Pangda Rapga and the Lhasa government. I had no doubt that the Pangda guerrillas could do immense damage to the Chinese in Sikang, but I lost much of my optimism when I heard that Pangda Topgye had gone to Kangting, the provincial capital, for talks with the Communists. He had left Po a day or so after Rapga set out for Chamdo. Topgye had still refused the Communists' invitations to go to Peking, but the fact that he was meeting them halfway looked ominous. I had the feeling that the Pangda brothers were ready to come to terms with whichever side seemed more likely to help them keep their power as medieval barons.

Rapga brought two letters from Geoffrey Bull, one for Lhalu and the other for me. Bull had at last left Sikang and crossed the river into Tibet. Rapga had left him at Markham Gartok,

where he was staying with Derge Sé. From there it would have been easy for him to take the southward route to Assam.

But Bull would not go. He had always wanted to come to Tibet, and now he was in the country he did not want to leave. He longed to go to Lhasa, to preach the Gospel of Christianity in the Holy City itself. I did not see eye to eye with Bull over converting Buddhists, but I admired him for his courage. I admired him still more when I read that he was applying for permission to come to Chamdo in order to help treat the wounded in the event of fighting.

Lhalu could not give him permission to come, and he passed the request on to the Lhasa government. I feared it would be refused. But I was glad to have Bull on the same side of the river as myself, so that there were two of us in eastern Tibet. If I had to leave by the southern route myself I thought we might make the journey together, for I was sure now that Bull was determined to stay till the last minute. Meanwhile he was in good hands with Derge Sé. He was as hospitable to Bull as the Pangda brothers had been, in spite of Bull's very open ambition to convert Buddhists to Christianity.

Pangda Rapga had come in time to attend on the last day of the government parties, when the drum-and-fife band of the Governor General's bodyguard played the tunes that had been originally brought into Tibet by a bandmaster of the Indian Army. They were mostly British regimental marches with some wrong notes. I had heard these before, and the mistakes then had been the same. Tibetan bands played entirely by ear, and if a mistake was repeated often enough it got into the unwritten score.

The party season ended with the band playing "God Save the King." It was not the custom to stand while this was played, so I had the unusual experience of having to remain

seated while the national anthem was played. It was the Tibetan as well as the British national anthem, and had also been brought in by the Indian Army bandmaster.

Geda Lama was present as well as Pangda Rapga, and they treated each other with distant courtesy. They had met before in Sikang, but they steered clear of each other while they were negotiating separately with the Lhasa government with very different ends in view.

That was Geda Lama's last public appearance before he was murdered.

I did not suspect that he had been poisoned when I first heard that he was ill. Tashi brought me the news.

"Will you see him, Phodo Kusho?" he asked.

"Has he asked for me?"

"No, but he seems very ill. There is something wrong with his inside."

I had made a point of never offering medical help without being asked, and I was especially reluctant to treat an incarnate lama. I knew that if one died on my hands I might be blamed. Geda being a Communist envoy created further unpleasant possibilities, and I hoped I would not be asked.

The next day Tashi told me Geda was worse. Then I heard that a physician from the monastery was coming to see him, and I thought it might well be his case rather than mine.

This medical monk was reputed to have cured many sick people with herbs, and at least I knew he was a good vet. He had treated a Khamba pony of mine with excellent results. Soon after I bought the pony it went lame in the left foreleg. Its fetlock was swollen, and I had no idea what to do. I told Lhalu about it, and then wished I had not, for he insisted on sending his physician to treat the pony. I thought he would use magic charms, but to my surprise he just nicked the

pony's fetlock in two places. The next day the pony was walking about. A week later it went lame in the right foreleg, and the doctor repeated the treatment with the same result. After that the pony was always in perfect condition.

I lacked the ability to diagnose internal disorders, and had few drugs to use for treatment. At Riwoche I had treated the sister of an incarnate lama with stomach powder for a complaint that turned out to be nothing worse than wind, but from Tashi's reports Geda Lama seemed to have more serious trouble than that. I thought he might do better with Lhalu's doctor's herbs than anything I could give him.

But Geda only got worse. I saw the medical monk and asked about his patient, and he told me the herbs had failed and Geda's only hope now lay in prayer. He was given a good deal of that. About twenty monks came down from the monastery with drums and cymbals and bells, and they chanted over Geda for two days. They were still chanting on the second evening when I went to bed.

The next morning Tashi told me Geda Lama had been cremated at dawn.

7

Border Question

CREMATION WAS THE NORMAL METHOD OF DISPOSING OF THE body of an incarnate lama, but it was not usually done so soon after death. Normally, time had to be allowed for the dead man's spirit to escape. That was the first thing that roused my suspicions.

I soon discovered other curious circumstances about Geda's death, and I felt very thankful that I had not offered him medical aid. I am afraid that is all I can say here. It took all my self-control to keep my knowledge to myself during long and merciless interrogations, and I am not going to reveal it now. I have good reasons for believing that Geda was murdered, and I think I know who killed him. I hope he will never be found out.

Geda's steward and the three pretty girls went back to Sikang, and the Chinese did not make any further attempts to send a representative through Chamdo to Lhasa. Pangda Rapga stayed. Hong Kong radio reported that the People's Liberation Army was advancing toward the Tibetan border, but that news was months out of date. We knew the Communists had reached the Upper Yangtze at several points. They

had not tried to cross the river again, and Muja still held Dengko. I had no idea how far they had gone to the northwest, but I gathered that Riwoche was not yet in immediate danger. I was disturbed to hear that in the south they had reached the river opposite Markham Gartok. My emergency escape route to Assam passed Markham Gartok on the west, but if the town fell it could quickly be cut. I hoped Derge Sé was as good as he seemed from his letters.

There was still no reason to expect that Tibet would get military aid from outside. In Korea the United Nations forces remained on the defensive, and even if India co-operated Tibet would be much harder than Korea to help. And Indian co-operation looked very unlikely now.

About this time Pandit Nehru said publicly that the Indian Ambassador in Peking had spoken informally to the Chinese government about Tibet. He had pointed out that India considered it desirable that the matter should be settled peacefully. It was understood that the Chinese had replied—also informally—that they had no intention of forcing the issue but were willing to negotiate for a settlement.

But on August 1 Radio Peking told me that Chu Teh, the Commander in Chief of the Communist Army, had repeated the Army's promise to "liberate" Formosa and Tibet.

Although Khona still monitored Radio Peking, I listened regularly to the news in English and Tibetan. I learned that I was still the enemy. There was no criticism of Tibet's feudal system, no promise of land reform, no appeal to the workers to rise and throw off their chains. It was simply a matter of getting rid of American and British imperialism. Tibet was told that if she did this China would respect her rights and allow her regional autonomy within the Chinese Republic. She was also promised that there would be no interference with her religion.

Several officials came to the radio station one day to hear a talk from Peking by a very learned and respected monk named Sherap Gyatso. He had been in one of the largest monasteries in Lhasa until fourteen years ago, when he went to China and began working for the Kuomintang. Now he had gone over to the Communists, who had rewarded him with the appointment of Vice-Chairman of the Provisional Government of Tsinghai. That such an eminent Buddhist theologian should support Communism had some effect on the Tibetans, and after the broadcast Tharchi Tsendron asked me if I thought the Chinese would really respect the Tibetan religion this time.

"I think Communists will follow whatever policy they consider to their best advantage," I said. "Of course they may decide that destroying monasteries would not help them to colonize Tibet."

But the Communists had no success in trying to win support for their candidate for new incarnation of the Panchen Lama.

The Panchen Lama, or Tashi Lama, was the second great spiritual leader in Tibet. His seat was at Shigatse, about two hundred miles west of Lhasa; and it had not been occupied for twenty-seven years.

The Panchen Lama was a spiritual leader only. Except in a few small districts round Shigatse, all temporal power was in the hands of the Dalai Lama. In the past, various Chinese governments had tried to change this without success. The Communists were now continuing the policy not only of the Kuomintang but of the Manchu dynasty before the Chinese Revolution.

When the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1910 the Dalai Lama fled to India and remained there for over two years. The

Chinese officially deposed him and ordered a new Reincarnation to be sought: but the people of Tibet remained loyal to their exiled God-King, and none was found. The Chinese then invited the Panchen Lama to take his place. Wisely he refused, although he went to Lhasa and was said to have sat on the Dalai Lama's throne.

The Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa in 1912 after the Chinese had been thrown out, without the help of the Panchen Lama. There was a long quarrel between the two spiritual leaders, and in 1923 the Panchen Lama fled to Tsinghai and accepted Chinese protection.

The thirteenth Dalai Lama died in 1933, and until the next Reincarnation was found Tibet was without both its traditional spiritual leaders. The Tibetans wanted the Panchen Lama to return. He was willing to do so—with an escort of three hundred Chinese troops. One of the main objects of the British Mission that went to Lhasa in 1936 was to try to persuade him to return without the troops, and it was ready to go to Jyekundo to meet him if necessary. Nothing came of this because the Panchen Lama was firmly in the hands of the Chinese.

In 1937 the Panchen Lama died. Within the next few years two boy candidates for his Reincarnation were found. One was in Tsinghai, and sponsored by the Chinese (Kuomintang) government. The other was in Lhasa. In the view of the Lhasa government both remained candidates, as they had not passed the religious tests. The Kuomintang government said the Tsinghai candidate was the true Reincarnation, and the Communists took him over. They even made him Chairman of a "Provisional Government of Tibet" in readiness to take over the throne if they gained physical control of the country and the Dalai Lama fled.

"We would never accept him as our ruler," Khenchi Dawala

told me. "When the Great Thirteenth was in exile our loyalty to him was not affected in the slightest degree. When the Chinese insulted him and deposed him it only increased our hatred of the Chinese."

Everyone, both monks and laymen, told me the same. They all wanted a new Reincarnation of the Panchen Lama to be installed, but outside Shigatse no one was prepared to accept him as a temporal ruler. Nor was there any general belief that the Tsinghai candidate was the true Reincarnation.

I heard a talk on the subject given by an anonymous official on Radio Lhasa.

"There are two candidates," he said. "No one knows for certain which is the true Reincarnation, for neither has passed the tests. In my opinion"—he was careful to emphasize that he was not speaking for the government—"the candidate in Lhasa will prove to be the true one."

And this timid statement was the nearest Radio Lhasa ever came to defying the Chinese.

I was still relaying the transmissions, and I had listened to every news bulletin and talk that had been broadcast. I had still not heard a single reply to Peking. No one had said that Tibet did not want to be liberated. There had not even been a denial that Tibet was controlled by American and British imperialists.

"How can you expect help when you don't even say you want to be helped?" I said to Tharchi Tsendron when he asked me whether I thought the United Nations would come to Tibet's aid. "You haven't even told the world that you will defend yourselves if you are attacked. Surely it isn't surprising that the world thinks you're going to give in."

"We shan't give in," he said. "But we don't want to fight if we can avoid it. We don't want to provoke the Chinese to attack."

"If Communists want to attack they'll invent the provocation," I said.

"Then we shall appeal for help."

"Then it will be too late. You haven't even told the world you consider yourselves independent now."

"Surely we showed that when we expelled the Chinese officials last summer?"

"You showed your neutrality in the Chinese Civil War, that's all. At least, that is how it was interpreted by other countries."

"But aren't we showing it now by refusing to go to Peking? Our delegation has been in India since the beginning of the year, trying to negotiate with the Chinese and always refusing to go to their country."

I tried to think of a Tibetan equivalent for "sitting on the fence," and then thought better of it. I had always been careful not to interfere in Tibetan politics, and I would not have said as much as I did if Tharchi had stopped throwing questions at me. But he still persisted.

"What do you think we should do then?" he asked.

"There are only two things you can do," I said. "Either proclaim that you are an independent state and determined to remain so, or go to Peking and get the best terms you can. Either would be better than just sitting and waiting to be swallowed up."

"But surely everyone knows Tibet is an independent state?"

That was the trouble. Everyone did not know. Under international law the question of Tibet's sovereignty was ambiguous and confused.

The fact of Tibet's independence was beyond doubt. Except for two short periods of Chinese rule, both of which were ended by a national revolt, Tibet had been an autonomous state for centuries. Under the Manchu dynasty the

Chinese had exercised a vague and remote suzerainty, based on a personal relationship between the Chinese Emperor and the Dalai Lama; but that had ended with the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Since then Tibet had been completely independent.

In 1913 Tibetan, Chinese, and British representatives met at Simla and initialed a convention under which Tibet recognized Chinese suzerainty on condition that China recognized Tibetan autonomy; in other words, nominal suzerainty in exchange for practical independence. But they could not agree on the frontier, and in the end the Chinese refused to sign. Tibet continued to enjoy *de facto* independence, and China continued to claim a suzerainty that she was unable to enforce. She also denied Tibet's right to autonomy. Even in Formosa, Chiang Kai-shek maintained that Tibet was simply a province of China. It was the one subject on which he and Mao Tse-tung agreed.

Britain recognized Tibet's independence, and so did most other countries—unofficially; officially the question never arose. For Tibet never sought recognition, never wanted to exchange ambassadors or open diplomatic relations, held herself aloof from all other nations.

"Doesn't that show that all we want is to be left alone?" said Tharchi Tsendron. "And isn't that our right?"

"Yes, Tharchi," I answered. "Morally there is no argument. I was talking about whether you are likely to get any help. That Tibet deserves help is obvious. I don't think I should be staying here if it wasn't."

"You are not in Tibet at all. Chamdo is in China. I've looked it up in an atlas."

If I heard that once I heard it a hundred times. And it was

very hard to convince British and American radio amateurs that their atlases were wrong.

“But it’s a new atlas. It was published this year.”

“I didn’t say it was out of date. I said it was wrong.”

“But it’s my son’s school atlas. He’s learning geography with this.”

“Then he’s learning it wrong.”

Their interest was not just academic. Many of them were trying to qualify for a “Worked All Zones” certificate that was issued by an American radio magazine to any amateur who could prove that he had been in contact with every zone in the world. For this purpose the world was divided into forty zones, and Zone 23 was the whole of Tibet. It was the hardest to work. As Fox was not doing much amateur radio now—he was a very sick man—radio “hams” (short for amateurs) were at first jubilant when they made contact with me. Then they looked up Chamdo in their atlases, and became reproachful or annoyed.

I sent a message to the Radio Society of Great Britain and the Radio Relay League in America pointing out that the atlases were wrong.

“What’s your authority for saying Chamdo is in Tibet?” one contact asked me.

“I’m in Chamdo, and I’m employed by the Tibetan government. I’m the first European to stay here for over thirty years. The last was Sir Eric Teichman, and the boundary lines on his maps are still pretty well right. Yours were always wrong.”

“Who put them in, then?”

“The Chinese.”

Chamdo had always been part of Tibet, although for one brief period (1910–18) it had been under Chinese military

occupation. Before then the Sino-Tibetan frontier had changed frequently, but it had never come as far west as Chamdo.

Chamdo had fallen to the Chinese when they invaded Tibet in 1910, and it had come under the rule of a frontier commissioner named Chao Erh-feng. Khenchi Dawala still remembered him by his nickname of "Butcher Chao," which he had earned for his habit of ordering wholesale executions. He had been butchered himself, by his fellow countrymen, in the Revolution of 1911, when the Chinese were thrown out of Lhasa and most of Kham. But they succeeded in holding Chamdo until it was liberated in 1918 after the Chinese had engaged in fresh aggression against Tibet with disastrous results for themselves.

"We could have liberated the whole of Tibet then," said Khenchi Dawala, referring to the provinces of Sikang and Tsinghai. "Lord Teichman stopped us from going on."

Mr. Teichman, who was later knighted, had admitted this himself. As British consular agent in western China he was asked to mediate by the Chinese, and he urged restraint on the Tibetans for their own good. In another month they could have reached the border between Sikang and the province of Szechwan, but the Chinese were not likely to let them stay there for long. Singlehanded Teichman stopped the war, and the Tibetans withdrew to a line running through Batang. In the 1930's the Chinese pushed them back to the west bank of the Upper Yangtze, thus approximately restoring the boundary that had been effective, with various changes, ever since 1727. This was still the *de facto* boundary in 1950. There was no *de jure* boundary. That was the trouble.

At the Simla Conference the Tibetans had claimed the whole of Sikang. The Chinese claimed up to the limit of Butcher Chao's advance in 1910, which had reached to within a few days' march of Lhasa. The British proposed a compro-

mise, which would have given Tibet complete autonomy as far as the Upper Yangtze and a degree of nominal control in Sikang. The Lhasa government was willing to accept this. The Chinese refused.

Ethnologically the Tibetan claim was beyond dispute. The Chinese claim was based solely on the temporary success of Butcher Chao's aggression in 1910. The British proposal was based on the situation as it was.

After the talks broke down the Chinese recognized their own claim and published their map for the whole world to see. The Tibetans had no maps that were even publishable. China had diplomatic relations with the other nations of the world. Tibet had not. The Chinese map was followed by map makers in other countries, including Britain, and that is why the atlases were wrong.

All of which was difficult to explain to the numerous radio amateurs who told me I was not in Tibet.

Lhalu began to talk to me about the future.

"Is Rugby a good school, Phodo?" he asked.

"I believe it is very good. It is one of the most famous schools in England."

"Did you go there?"

"No, Your Excellency." I tried to explain the difference between a public school and a grammar school.

"You know that my father took four Tibetan boys to Rugby?"

"Yes, I met Kyipup in Lhasa."

Kyipup was the only survivor of the four sons of Tibetan nobles whom Lhalu's father had taken to England in 1913 at the suggestion of Sir Charles Bell. After leaving Rugby each of the boys had been trained in a profession. Kyipup had taken surveying, and on his return to Tibet he had been given

the task of developing the telegraph system. There was only one telegraph line in the country, running from Lhasa to Kalimpong, in Bengal, and it had been built by the British.

Kyipup is dead now, so I cannot hurt his feelings when I say he was not one of the most intelligent Tibetans I met. He failed with the telegraphs, and was then appointed City Magistrate and Chief of Police. He had such a nervous, apologetic manner that it was hard to think of him in a position of this sort, and he did not hold it for long. One of his duties was the erection of poles for the New Year which, like those outside the Residency at Chamdo, were made of a number of tree trunks bound together with yak's hide and rose seventy or eighty feet high. If one fell down in Lhasa the City Magistrate lost his job, and that is what happened to Kyipup. Then he went into the Foreign Office, and acted as interpreter and guide for English-speaking visitors. He also sometimes read the news in Tibetan on Radio Lhasa, and he was the speaker I had heard talking on the Panchen Lama. I knew him quite well, and it was he who had prostrated himself on my behalf when I had my last audience with the Dalai Lama.

"The experiment was not a great success," said Lhalu.

That was not entirely the boys' faults. One of them, a monk named Möndö, had shone at cricket and showed some aptitude for mining engineering, which he studied after leaving school. Tibet is rich in minerals, including gold, and they had never been exploited. Möndö came back and began prospecting. At once the local abbot protested that he was upsetting the spirits and would cause the crops to fail.

Möndö did not want to be blamed for a possible bad harvest, so he moved to another district and began digging there. The same thing happened. After a few more attempts he abandoned prospecting and went into Church politics, in

which he was much more successful. But he upset Lhasa by riding a motorcycle he had brought from India, and one day the noise made a frightened mule buck a high official. Möndö was degraded and put in charge of a remote district in western Tibet. Later he returned to Lhasa, but he did not ride his motorcycle again. Nor did he try any more prospecting. So far as he was concerned, as Lhalu said, the Rugby experiment was not a success.

"My father said that Ghonkar was the best of the boys," Lhalu told me. "I wish he were still here now."

I did, too. Ghonkar had gone to Woolwich, and was expected to remodel the Tibetan Army. But for political reasons he had been posted to a frontier station in Kham, and he died young. I had heard a rumor that he had fallen in love with an English girl and been forbidden to marry her by the Dalai Lama, and that he had died of a broken heart or some other more sinister cause.

The fourth of the Rugby boys, Ringang, was the only one who achieved anything in Tibet. Being the youngest, he spent a longer period than the others in England, and took a course in electrical engineering. When he came back to Lhasa he built a hydroelectric power station at the foot of a mountain stream and laid a power line to the city and to the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace. All the equipment had to be brought over the Himalayas by porters or on mules.

It was a tremendous undertaking for a Tibetan—and it worked. Except for a few months in the winter, when the stream was frozen, it provided the city with electric light. But nothing was spent on maintenance, and after Ringang died the plant fell into disrepair. When I was in Lhasa it produced only enough power to drive the machines in the Mint. It was to replace this that Reginald Fox and Peter

Aufschnaiter were building a new hydroelectric station on much more ambitious lines.

"I want my two boys to be engineers," said Lhalu. "I want them to go to Rugby, too. I shall take them there myself. Perhaps you will come with me, Phodo?"

I would have loved to take Lhalu to England, although I think he might have been a little disappointed. When he looked at the pictures in my illustrated magazines he was always pleased to find ceremonial events like Trooping the Color.

"You are just like us when you are at home," he said. "Why don't you wear bright clothes like these when you come to Tibet?"

Lhalu wanted to travel round the world. He wanted me to go with him.

"When I return to Lhasa," he said, "I shall organize a new trade mission and lead it myself. It will go to England, America, all over the world. I hope you will be able to come if you can leave the radio by then. I wish you had gone on the last one."

The last trade mission, which had been abroad for nearly two years, had been a flop; at least, from Tibet's point of view. No doubt Pangda Tsang and some of the other members had done good business, but it had failed in its real object, which was to gain economic and political help. It had only been called a trade mission so as not to annoy the Chinese. They had been annoyed, all the same. The mission had arrived in Washington unannounced, and the Chinese Embassy (Kuomintang) at once protested against the admission to the United States of "Chinese subjects with false passports."

"The mission failed because none of the members could

speak English properly or knew anything about the outside world," said Lhalu.

I thought the mission had failed because its members had been too timid to open international relations on their own account.

"You know both worlds, and if you come with me as a Tibetan government official you can do even more for us than you are doing now. With you in it the next trade mission will be a success."

I thought that with a man like Lhalu as the leader it could be a success. I only hoped it was not too late.

I found one compensation in the fact that Lhalu was going to leave Chamdo. He was likely to stiffen the Cabinet in Lhasa, and it needed stiffening.

It was becoming more and more obvious that the Lhasa government was pitifully weak. I could see clearly that the people had more spirit to resist than their rulers. But Tibet had always been like this when the Dalai Lama was a minor, and a number of officials were jockeying for power.

From what I had seen and heard of the Fourteenth Reincarnation I gathered that he was exceptionally able and intelligent, and had the makings of a ruler of the same caliber as the Great Thirteenth. His minority would end soon; but again I feared it might be too late.

Meanwhile I was waiting to learn what sort of man would be sent to Chamdo.

"Ngabö Shapé is to be the new Governor General," Lhalu told me at last.

This cheered me up a bit. I had met Ngabö at parties in Lhasa. I had not known him well, but I was impressed by his seriousness and I had heard he was efficient. He was also said to be brave and resolute and to have no love for the Chinese. Moreover, he had already done one tour of duty

in Kham, as lay Finance Minister. At least the government had chosen a man who knew the country, which was of vital importance as he would automatically become Commander in Chief of all forces in the province.

Ngabö had not been a *shapé*, a lay Cabinet Minister, when I met him, and no vacancy in the four-man Cabinet had arisen. The Governor General of Kham did not have to be of Cabinet rank, so in creating a fifth *shapé* the government was underlining the present importance of the appointment. I thought that was another good sign.

Ngabö left Lhasa at the beginning of August. The journey would take him over a month, and handing over would take nearly as long. It was unlikely that Lhalu would leave until the end of September. If the invasion had not begun by then it seemed probable that it would be postponed until the following year. It would be too late for the Chinese to have a chance of reaching Lhasa before the winter brought them to a halt.

In the evening of August 15 I was in my office writing a letter when I felt my chair moving. As I stopped writing I heard an ominous creak from the beams. I looked up and saw the walls heaving, and dust fell down on me from the ceiling. Then the whole building trembled, and I was running out of the office for my life.

"Get outside!" I shouted to the servants. "Quick! Run! It's an earthquake!"

8

Before the Storm

WE GOT CLEAR OF THE HOUSE, AND I RAN TO KNOCK UP RIMSHI Trokao. He was already on his way down.

"The gods!" he exclaimed.

It seemed more like devils' work to me. For this was no ordinary earthquake: it felt like the end of the world.

We went and stood in the open, clear of all buildings.

"Listen!" said Rimshi Trokao.

So the rumbles were not my imagination. Was it thunder? But there was no lightning, and it was anything but stormy weather. Gunfire, then? The series of dull explosions sounded like distant artillery. Perhaps the Chinese had chosen this moment to attack, but it seemed a strange coincidence. Yet what else could it be?

"The gods!"

That was sufficient explanation for everyone else, and as it happened they were right. At least, the rumbling was part of what we call an act of God. I did not know it then, but I was hearing the noise of the earth's crust cracking up.

"Look!" said Rimshi Trokao.

A great red glow appeared in the cloudless sky to the south-

west. That could not be the Chinese. I realized it was all part of this earthquake, already remarkable for its violence and the fact that there had been no premonitory tremors.

"Phodo Kusho! A house has fallen down! Someone is hurt! Please come."

I told Puntso to bring my pressure lamp and told Tenné to come with me. Three or four houses had collapsed, but the people had got out in time. The casualty was a girl who had been pinned under a falling beam. She was conscious and groaning, and as she was a Khamba that meant she was in great pain. The beam had caught her leg—an almost certain fracture. I told Tenné to bring splints, bandages, morphia, blankets, and my camp bed. Then we had to jack up the beam to get her out. Part of the roof still hung above us, and the earth would not keep still. I was sweating with more than exertion when at last we drew her clear.

It was not so bad as I had feared. There was a break, for certain, but her leg had not taken the full weight of the beam. At least it was a simple fracture, and not of the remur. I diagnosed a break in the shaft of the tibia. The fibula seemed all right. As a first-aid job it would have been easy, but I had to set the break.

Do-Tseten helped. He had cooked for the doctor at the Indian Mission, and could act as a medical orderly at a pinch. I gave the girl a shot of morphia, treated her for shock, and set the fracture as gently as I could. Then I put on the splints.

A woman came out of one of the other damaged houses, carrying a baby. It had been burned by the fire when the roof crashed in, and the pot had fallen over and scalded the baby's arm. I told the woman to bring the child to the radio station, and treated the scald with penicillin ointment. Only then did I realize that the tremors had ceased.

There were no more casualties. Chamdo had got off lightly,

considering the violence of the tremors. I wondered if there were more to come. I felt sure that this would be regarded as a terrible omen and start a panic of prayer.

There I was wrong.

Tharchi Tsendron came early the next morning, and I expected to be asked all about seismology. But he was too pleased for that.

"Did you smell it?" he asked.

"Smell what?"

"It was like burning matches. Not at first, but a few hours later."

The rumblings and the glow began to make a little more sense.

"Sulphur," I said. "Like a volcanic eruption."

"The gods were showing their strength," said Tharchi.

As soon as I had finished my schedule with Fox I went to see my patients. Both were doing well.

"When can I get up?" the girl asked.

"Not for several weeks. You mustn't touch these pieces of wood or move your leg." I examined it and thought I had not done too badly. With luck and care—but that would be difficult—she would be able to walk again without too bad a limp.

She was a pretty girl. I knew most of the people of Chamdo, and I had not seen her before.

"Are you married?" I asked.

"No. I have come to get a husband."

"Where are you from?"

She named a village a few miles outside Chamdo.

"Do you want to be taken back to your parents?"

"I have no parents."

"Other relatives, then? Or have you some here?"

"I have no relatives. They have all been killed."

They had all been killed in a blood feud, she told me. It

had been going on for generations, and now all her family except herself had been wiped out. She had been lucky to get away alive.

"That is why I want a husband," she said.

"To protect you?"

"No, to give me children so that they can kill them."

I was horrified. If I had left her alone she might have been too badly deformed to get a husband, and then the blood feud would have died out.

I traded on what I had done for her.

"Why don't you forget it?" I said. "If your children kill them they will kill your children."

"You don't understand," she said.

The woman with the scalded baby was looking after her. I told her what to do. The baby was comfortable, and the mother cheerful although her home had been wrecked.

"The gods have shown their strength," she said.

I went to see Lhalu. I could have taken the words out of his mouth.

"Phodo," he said, "the gods have shown their strength."

It was all perfectly logical. The gods had caused the earthquake, and they would not have done that for nothing. It was a big earthquake, so they were showing their strength. The Chinese had no gods, so this could not be for their benefit. The gods had shown they would help Tibet, and no army could stand up against such might.

"You see the power of prayer," said Lhalu. But he was no fool. "This is a signal for us to redouble our efforts. We must pray more, and be more than ever ready to resist the Chinese."

Morale was higher than it had been since the beginning of the year. I was pleased about that, but my own morale was low. I was hearing the reports of the earthquake from Delhi.

Apparently it had been one of the five biggest earthquakes

ever recorded, and it had literally changed the face of the earth.

Mountains had become valleys, and vice versa: one mountain had fallen into the Brahmaputra, changing its course, and hundreds of villages were inundated. Landslides and floods had caused immense loss of life. The gods seemed to have a funny way of showing they were on our side, and it was not at all auspicious for me.

The epicenter of the earth was on the border between Tibet and Assam, about two hundred miles from Chamdo. It was directly on my emergency escape route. And the reports made it clear that the route had gone. I might as well try to find my own way over the Himalayas.

I was alarmed about Geoffrey Bull, for it was his only way out. There was no radio receiver at Markham Gartok, so I wrote to him and Derge Sé giving them a summary of the news. Then I went to see Lhalu.

"Unless Bull is allowed to come to Chamdo," I said, "he is almost bound to fall into the hands of the Communists. He is a missionary, and they are not kind to men who preach religion."

"If he came to Chamdo," said Lhalu, "and the Chinese also came, where would he go then?"

"He could withdraw with us."

"And where would we go? Which way could we go?"

He had made his point. The only way Bull could leave Tibet now was through Lhasa. A Christian missionary was the last person to be allowed in the Holy City.

"If he was allowed to come," Lhalu said, "do you think he would refrain from trying to convert our people to his religion?"

"Yes," I lied.

"You know that I cannot give him permission myself," said

Lhalu. "But I will ask the government again. I will explain the new situation, and recommend that permission should be given."

It was better than nothing, but I had little doubt what the answer would be. If Tibet was invaded Bull was almost bound to be captured. By comparison my own position was very good. But only by comparison.

"Phodo," Lhalu said, when I saw him shortly after passing some government messages to Rimshi Trokao for decoding, "you were right. The earthquake was inauspicious. The gods were showing their anger and displeasure."

Shiwala Rimpoche had made a mistake. The monks in the Potala had placed an exactly opposite interpretation on the earthquake, and Lhasa was heavy with gloom. So was Chamdo, as soon as the correct interpretation was known. The jubilation ceased at once, there were long faces everywhere, and all the people prayed harder than ever.

Lhalu ordered defense preparations to be intensified.

On August 26 there was another tremor, but no damage was done. Then the earthquake was forgotten when Ngabö arrived.

Lhalu had already vacated the Residency and moved to Shiwala Rimpoche's house, a few miles down the river. He sent his equerry and some of the junior officials to Lamda, the last stage before Chamdo, to welcome Ngabö and escort him in. Every official in Chamdo except Lhalu himself was expected to ride to the willow grove just outside the town, where the usual reception tent was pitched. Every official went, except me.

I doubt if an official had ever before failed to appear on such an occasion on a plea of duty, for his most important duty was to attend. But I had to keep my radio schedules

with Fox, and was granted a special dispensation. I sent Tashi to present a white scarf on my behalf, and then I saw the long caravan ride past my house and through the town. As soon as Ngabö reached the Residency I rode over with presents and another white scarf and paid my first call. I apologized for not having gone to meet him, and he smiled and said he understood very well.

He was a tall and stately man, long-jawed and with a dignified but cheerful face.

"The government greatly appreciates your decision to stay," he said. "If you need any help do not hesitate to come to me.

"As you probably know," he went on, "during the period of taking over there will be a number of parties and other receptions. I hope you will come to as many as you can, but I shall understand when your work keeps you away."

It seemed a good start. I did not think I could ever be as friendly with Ngabö as I had been with Lhalu—he was more formal and made me more conscious of our difference in rank—but at least he seemed thoughtful and understanding. And I took him at his word, for I was too busy to attend many receptions.

Ngabö had brought another portable radio station, and he told me to get it ready to send out. Unfortunately no operators had come with it, and I had to consider whether to put it in the hands of Dronyer or Wangda or both. They were now pretty good operators and reasonable mechanics, and at a pinch either could have taken charge of a station. Both were ready to go. Tsering was no problem: if Wangda went she would go too. I did not like the idea of sending one of them alone, but on the other hand I wanted to have someone at Chamdo to relieve me in case of an emergency. I decided to shelve the problem until the time came.

Meanwhile Fox was going on sick leave. He was now nearly crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, and he was going to Calcutta for treatment. About a year earlier two Americans had visited Lhasa, the Lowell Thomases, father and son. I had spoken to them on the radio telephone. After returning home they arranged for a supply of the new drug cortisone to be sent to Calcutta by air for treating Fox. Now he was riding painfully across the Himalayas, having left the best of his trainees in charge of the station at Lhasa. They were not very quick operators, so I took on more work by having all traffic channeled through me.

There were now three more stations in operation—one at Shigatse and the other two in western Tibet. A radio was necessary at Shigatse for political reasons, because it was the seat of the Panchen Lama. The other two were of little use from the point of view of defense, and it seemed absurd that of the six stations operating only one was in Kham.

What was even more galling was the knowledge that yet another portable station, with two operators trained by Fox, had come with Ngabö—and was to return to Lhasa with Lhalu.

Perhaps I was unreasonable in thinking that Lhalu ought to have waived his right to the station and operators and left them in Kham. After all, he was a Cabinet Minister, and it had evidently been decided that when such a high official made the journey between Chamdo and Lhasa a radio station should be included in his caravan. But Lhalu knew how great the need was for stations at Dengko and Riwoche, and it was galling to think that a station and operators were kept idle in the Residency throughout the critical month of September.

I felt sure it was the critical month. There was little doubt that the Chinese were now in some strength on the Upper

Yangtze and in Jyekundo as well. An attack might come at any moment. Reinforcements of men and matériel were still arriving in Chamdo, and more Khamba levies were recruited and sent out; but most of the officials, including Dimön Depön, were preoccupied with the changing-over receptions and ceremonies at the Residency.

I spoke again to Tashi and Lobsang about sending their wives back to Lhasa.

"They could go with Lhalu Shapé's caravan," I said. I was sending most of my personal belongings with it.

But none of the other officials were sending their wives back, and Ngabö's wife and children were actually leaving Lhasa to join him in Chamdo. I was wasting my breath. The status of women in Tibet was high for an Asian country, although still low by European standards; and there was no equivalent phrase in the Tibetan language for "the weaker sex." Even now the troops still had their families at the frontier posts, including Dengko. I could not imagine what would happen to them in the event of a fight or a retreat.

I saw little of Lhalu after Ngabö had arrived, and knew less of what was going on. I paid official calls on Ngabö from time to time, but no confidences were exchanged. He did not consult me about defense preparations or ask for my advice. I felt more or less isolated in the radio station, and frustrated because there was so little I could do. When I was not working I spent most of my time trying to relax with Tharchi Tsendron.

I could never think of Tharchi as a monk. Partly this was because he did not dress like one. Outside Lhasa all monk officials wore the same bright silks as lay officials, and could be distinguished only by their shaven heads and lack of earrings. When I first arrived in Chamdo I could hardly tell

who was a monk and who was not; for to make it still more confusing, the Khamba lay officials were all dressed like monks. The reason for this was that when they had been allowed to wear what they liked the richer Khambas dressed more splendidly than junior Lhasa officials, like Tashi and Lobsang; this was considered to lower the dignity of the Lhasa government, so it was decided to put them in a uniform. The monk's robe was chosen because it made the regulation easy to enforce. Many Khambas had short hair and wore no earrings, so to me they looked just like monks.

Another unmonkish thing about Tharchi was that he liked bathing. Most monks never even washed. Saturday was a holiday in Tibet, and in the summer Tharchi and I used to go down to the river for a swim, or rather a bath. I had a collapsible bath in my quarters, but it was more pleasant in the river, and I followed the local custom and took a bar of soap.

I also took shampoo, and this impressed Tharchi so much that once he asked me to shampoo his half-inch stubble. I had hardly begun when he suddenly jumped into the water and rinsed the shampoo off.

"What's the matter, Tharchi?" I asked him when he came back. "Didn't it feel good?"

"It felt all right," he said, "but I don't want my hair to go fair like yours."

I assured him my hair had always been fair, and was not due to the shampoo, but he was not convinced. Even when I had been in Chamdo nearly a year people sometimes stared at my strange features and coloring as if they could not really believe I had been born like that.

I taught Tharchi to swim. Tibetans are poor swimmers, and their only stroke is a kind of dog paddle; being human, I showed off a bit. I also impressed them with my diving, for this was completely unknown to them. I never managed to

persuade Tharchi to dive, but he learned to swim quite well.

He also joined in the football I played with the Indians. I had brought a ball with me from India, and can fairly claim it was the first that was ever kicked at Chamdo. Other Britons had brought the game to Lhasa long before, and it had become so popular that at one time there was an organized league. But the Church had disapproved—it was said the monks wasted their time watching when they could have been praying—and when a hailstorm occurred during a match the game was doomed. Hailstorms in Tibet can be very powerful and cause immense damage to crops, and farmers used to employ special magicians to ward them off. Football could not be allowed to nullify magic that was vital to the country's economy, so in Lhasa the game was now forbidden.

For this reason I did not try to introduce it into Chamdo. We just kicked the ball about among ourselves in the compound, and occasionally other officials and the servants joined in. Horkhang Sé sometimes played, and once was nearly knocked out when the ball hit the charm box on the crown of his head. Only Sonam Puntso and I ever headed the ball by design, and then there were roars of laughter as it was assumed it was an accident and we had not been able to get out of the way.

Tharchi was interested in the outside world, and asked me many questions about England. I amazed him most when I told him we had no yaks.

“How can a country live without yaks?” he asked.

It was beyond his imagination that life could be possible without this shaggy, bison-like animal that supplied most of Tibet's needs. In a land without machinery it was vital for transport and on the farms. Its hair was used for making tents, blankets, and very strong ropes. Its hide was used not only for boots and saddlebags, but also for coracles, Tibet's

only boats. Its horns were used as snuffboxes, and its tail for making fly whisks and Santa Claus beards (for export only). Its dung was used occasionally as manure but almost universally as fuel, for no coal was mined and much of the country lies above the tree line. And the yak was the Tibetans' staple diet in the form of milk, butter, and meat. The butter was also used for lighting, making images, and polishing floors.

"How can you live without yaks?" Tharchi asked again, and I began to wonder how we did.

He helped me to improve my Tibetan, and translated the Khamba dialect into the Lhasa form for my benefit. In return I taught him a few words of English. Childlike, he would store a word in his memory and then produce it with a grin when an opportunity arose.

"What is the English for *nyingdu*?" he asked me one day.

"Sweetheart," I told him.

The next time I was at his house he pointed to one of his servants, a young boy, and said proudly, "I sweetheart."

I told him his English was improving.

There was nothing unmonkish about having a catamite. On the contrary, in this Tharchi was typical. Homosexuality was not illegal in Tibet, and among the monks it was encouraged on the grounds that it helped them to remain celibate. It also helped to leaven the ruling class with peasant class.

In Tibetan families of all classes it was the custom to put at least one child into the church. Sons of nobles were eagerly sought after by individual monasteries, as they brought some of the family wealth; and of course many of the monk government officials were of noble birth. But it was possible for a peasant's boy to achieve high rank as a monk, and Tharchi was an example. He had risen in the same way as his boy servant was likely to rise.

He had been a monk from the age of four, and he was still

only a boy when he became the servant of a monk official. He was chosen for his good looks, and he had these to thank for his present rank of *tseñdron*. It was the easiest way for a peasant's son to rise in the world.

In Delhi the Tibetan delegation was having talks with the newly arrived Chinese Ambassador, General Yuan. In Korea the tide had turned at last, and United Nations forces were pushing the Communists back. On the Upper Yangtze all was still quiet.

I reminded Ngabö of the portable radio station he had brought me by telling him for the second time that it was ready to be sent out.

"Thank you, Phodo," he said. "Please keep it in readiness. At any time we might need to send it out."

I could not tell him that the time was now—that, in fact, it ought to have been sent out long ago. Not to Dengko, which was no longer so important, but to Riwoche. According to the reports I heard there were now many Chinese troops in Tsinghai.

Yet he seemed to have everything under control. Of a less volatile temperament than Lhalu, he gave me the impression of being cool and efficient and quietly confident.

Lhalu had spoken to him about my position in the event of a Tibetan surrender, and he gave me a similar assurance to warn me in advance. It was no longer much of a safeguard, now that the southern route to Assam had gone, but Ngabö promised that he would help me to get away through Lhasa.

"But you do not need to worry," he said. "We shall not give the Chinese permission to send troops into Tibet. If they enter by force we shall resist. If necessary, of course, we shall evacuate Chamdo and retreat on Lhasa. There will be no local surrender as long as I am in Chamdo."

Reinforcements were still arriving from Lhasa, and I felt reasonably reassured. I still had not received my new contract, but that was of little importance now.

Rimshi Trokao told me he was going back to Lhasa with Ngabö.

"But no relief has come for you," I said.

"One will be sent later," he said.

This worried me. Relieving Lhalu was bad enough, but to recall his right-hand man without sending a relief seemed madness at a time like this. Rimshi Trokao had more local knowledge than any other official, and if we had to leave Chamdo he was the man who would requisition the transport.

"I am sorry you are going," I said.

"It is unavoidable, Phodo Kusho. The State Oracle has said it would be inauspicious for me to stay."

From what I knew of the State Oracle it was unlikely that he had said anything of the kind. I had seen him perform in public, gesticulating, gyrating, and beating his breast, hissing, groaning, and gnashing his teeth, foaming at the mouth like an epileptic. I had heard the unintelligible mouthings which his secretary repeated as answers to the questions put to him by the Cabinet; and these answers were usually ambiguous. But I could not believe the State Oracle would have been consulted about Rimshi Trokao. He might have been asked about the appointment or relief of a Governor General, but mostly the questions were on matters of major religious or political importance, like the meaning of an earthquake or whether to fight or give in to the Chinese. The whole function of the State Oracle was to relieve the Cabinet of the responsibility of making decisions that might turn out to be wrong. When this happened the Oracle was dismissed

and a new one appointed, and there were no setbacks to anyone's political career.

The obvious explanation was that Ngabö did not want Rimshi Trokao to stay. The nature of Tibetan political intrigues made that understandable, but I thought Ngabö might have kept him until a relief could arrive.

Everyone was going. By the end of September Fox had reached India, and I heard from friends in Lhasa that the Indian doctor had said it was doubtful if he would ever be well enough to return. Mr. Hugh Richardson handed over to an Indian officer and left the Mission. Geoffrey Bull and I were the only Britons left in Tibet. We had never met, and I thought, with uncanny foresight, that we were not likely to now unless it was in a Chinese jail.

It was worse for Bull, who was in greater danger and completely cut off from the outside world. His only contact was by correspondence with me. At least I had my radio. And with even a low-power transmitter like mine, a radio "ham" need never be lonely wherever he is.

I kept in radio contact with Reggie Fox in India. Every Wednesday evening I was in touch with Jefferies, and through him with my parents. And long after Chamdo was in bed I sat by my radio talking to friends I had made all over the world. The freemasonry of radio "hams" is unique, and even pierces curtains of iron and bamboo. Language is no problem, for all operators use not only the international Q code but also the abbreviated English peculiar to "hams." It was quite normal for a Russian to conclude a conversation with "TKS FB QSO OM" ("Thanks for fine business contact, old man"). Russians also confirmed contacts by mail in the usual way, and I had quite a collection of cards adorned with photographs of Lenin and Stalin and a bearded gentleman named Popov, the true (*Pravda* truth) inventor of radio.

But most of my contacts were with England, and they kept my spirits up. I was beginning to feel homesick.

Then I had a letter from George Tsarong in Lhasa.

"Delivery of the new hydroelectric equipment has been promised for October," he wrote. "If Fox is not back by then, do you think you will be able to come and help to install the plant?"

My thoughts went back to the last day I had spent with Fox and George.

George Tsarong was the most sophisticated and progressive Tibetan I ever met.

He was the son of Tsarong Dzasa, Horkhang Sé's sometime stepfather and reputedly the richest man in Tibet. Tsarong Dzasa was a rare phenomenon in Tibet, a self-made man. The son of an arrow maker, he had saved the Thirteenth Dalai Lama from capture by the Chinese and risen to become a Cabinet Minister. He was forward-looking and yet had his roots deep in the past. He had built the only steel bridge in Tibet, and claimed to have seen ghosts. He employed monks to pray for him, and subscribed to the *National Geographic Magazine*.

George, who had acquired his name at school in Darjeeling, had been one of the first of Fox's original trainees at the British Mission. He had his own ciné-cameras and darkroom, and had built a radio receiver himself. When the supply of electricity in Lhasa gave out he imported a wind-driven generator and installed it beside the prayer wheels and incense burners on the roof of his house. He was a moving spirit in both radio communications and the new hydroelectric scheme, and of all the Tibetans he was closest to the handful of Europeans who lived and worked in Lhasa.

There had never been many, and with the departure of

Fox and Mr. Richardson only three were left: Harrer, Aufschnaiter, and Nedbailoff. They had all escaped from the internment camp at Dehra Dun and gone to Tibet to seek refuge from the British. Nedbailoff's was the strangest story of all.

He was a White Russian, and had escaped from the Communists via Siberia. In the course of many years he had walked right down through China to Calcutta, earning enough to eat by doing odd jobs, mostly mechanical, on the way. He had picked up enough knowledge to become an efficient electrical engineer. In Calcutta he worked for a German electrical firm, and was allowed to go on working after World War II broke out. But when Soviet Russia was brought in on our side he withdrew his undertaking not to do anything detrimental to the Allied cause, and was interned in Dehra Dun. At the end of the war he heard that he was going to be sent back to Russia, so he escaped. He was caught in Tibet and brought to Gangtok, where I interviewed him. Mr. A. J. Hopkinson, the Political Officer, was sympathetic and gave him a job in Gangtok. George Tsarong heard about him, and invited him to go to Lhasa to work on the hydroelectric scheme.

We Europeans never formed a colony in Lhasa, and our chief bond was a common desire to help Tibet. We wanted to help to make the country materially richer and yet not poorer in any other way. We were all working for Tibet. Aufschnaiter had done all the spadework—literally—for the hydroelectric scheme, and Fox had designed the plant. Nedbailoff came to help him install it. Harrer, who had helped Aufschnaiter in other feats of hydraulic engineering, had new plans to develop Tibetan education. With Fox's help I was opening up radio communications.

We had something else in common. With the exception of

Aufschnaiter, who was an agricultural engineer, none of us had any professional degrees or diplomas. We had all come to Tibet more or less by accident—two of us to serve Britain, the other three escaping from the British; and although we had kept our respective nationalities, although none of us even wanted to be naturalized, we had a common loyalty to the Tibetan government and people. And we had the proud spirit of pioneers.

I had spent a day with Fox and George Tsarong shortly before I left Lhasa. We talked about the future. I did not expect to be in Chamdo for more than two years at the most, and Fox hoped to be able to give up radio work before then. He already had plans for building more hydroelectric stations with Nedbailoff. I would supervise an ever-growing network of radio stations all over the country. Aufschnaiter would modernize Tibetan agriculture, and Harrer would open schools and the first Tibetan university. George would become a Cabinet Minister. Tibetans would be trained in our various techniques, and eventually we Europeans would all work ourselves out of our jobs.

George smiled at that. It would not be done so quickly, he said; and if it was we would only go if we did not want to stay. Tibet had never been a British colony, had never been under European rule. It was different in India, where British technicians might be regarded with a mixture of gratitude and resentment, to be retained only until they could be replaced by Indians. In Tibet we were on an equal footing from the start.

No, not equal, said Fox. We were only in the fifth rank; George was already above us, and would be in the third rank before long. George laughed and reminded us that we had been told specifically that our ranks were not merely honorary, and that promotion was equally open to us. I said we

were not rich enough to be *shapés*, but perhaps I might become Minister of Radio Communications. Fox said I would have to share the job with a monk, and as our hopes and plans became touched with fantasy laughter stopped us from taking ourselves too seriously. But the feeling of exhilaration remained. It had lasted long enough to help to keep me in Tibet.

I wrote back to George saying I did not expect to be able to leave Chamdo yet. Then I went to say good-by to Lhalu. I took the customary white scarf and presents, and Lhalu received me formally. Then tea was brought, and he told his servants he did not want to be disturbed.

He thanked me for everything, and I thanked him; and then we both relaxed and talked as friends. We were closer than ever before, and when we finally shook hands emotion dried us up. I think we both had a premonition that we would never meet again.

“Phodo,” said Lhalu, “I hope I shall see you in Lhasa soon.”

“I hope so, too.”

“At least the danger here is less now,” he added. “The Chinese cannot hope to reach Lhasa this year. They will not try before the spring.”

“No,” I agreed. “It’s too late for them to attack now.”

A week later the Chinese attacked.

PART II
INVASION

9

The Battle for Kham

"SEE YOU SAME TIME NEXT WEEK," I TAPPED OUT. "GOOD NIGHT, Mum. Thanks, Jeff."

"Good night, Robert." My mother's voice was clear. "Look after yourself."

It was 11 P.M., Tibetan time, on Wednesday, October 11, 1950.

I switched off the radio and went to the window. All Chamdo was asleep. The huddle of mud houses looked beautiful in the moonlight, with the surrounding mountains silhouetted against the starry sky. It was a clear, frosty night, and the silence was broken only by the barking of dogs. I was turning to go to bed when I heard a faint tinkle of bells coming from the east.

As the bells grew louder I heard another sound, the clip-clop of a horse's hoofs. It was being ridden at a fast amble, and I went out onto my veranda to see it approach. It was coming down by the East River, and it passed my house on its way into the town. I saw the rider's fur hat and the silhouette of the barrel of his rifle sticking up above his shoulder, and knew him for an Army messenger. He rode on

in the direction of the Residency. With a feeling of uneasiness I went to bed.

I rose at seven the next morning, and was still dressing when Tashi burst in.

"Phodo Kusho, the Chinese are coming!"

"What have you heard?"

"They've crossed the river and killed all the troops."

"Where?"

"At Gangto Druga."

"How do you know?"

"The messenger told me. He's from Rangsum—no one at Gangto Druga got away."

Both places were on the normal trade route from Kangting to Chamdo. The ferry across the Upper Yangtze was at Gangto Druga, a small village and frontier post. Rangsum, one day's march farther west, was a garrison town astride the trade route. It was five days' march from Chamdo.

Tashi went out to see if he could glean any more news. At eight o'clock I had my first schedule with Lhasa, and I had just begun operating when Lobsang brought in a very long government message. When we finished the schedule I told the Lhasa operator to come on the air again at ten in case there was further urgent official traffic. Then I went to see Ngabö.

We were going through the town when I heard bells from behind, and another Army messenger overtook us in great haste.

"He's one of Muja Depön's men," Tenné told me.

We rode on to the Residency, where several ponies were already quartered in the courtyard. On my way in I met Dimön Depön.

"What is the news?" he asked me automatically.

"It's my turn to ask you that," I said.

"The Chinese have attacked. We are throwing them back. We shall beat them," he said confidently. "Excuse me—I have to see my wife."

I had to wait ten minutes before Ngabö received me. He looked as cool and unruffled as ever.

"I expect you have heard the news," he said.

"I've heard that the Chinese have taken Gangto Druga."

"Yes," said Ngabö. "They also tried to take our forces at Rangsum, but Khatang Depön succeeded in withdrawing them in time. He will hold the Chinese at the next pass to the west."

"When did they start the invasion?" I asked.

"On Saturday."

So the war had been going on for nearly five days before Eastern Command Headquarters learned that it had begun. If there had been a radio at Gangto Druga—

"The Chinese also tried to cross the river at Dengko," said Ngabö. "They were thrown back with heavy losses."

Good old Muja! With a few more officers like him the Tibetans could put up a good fight.

"What about north of Riwoche?" I asked.

"All is quiet on the northern front. As you know, the Chinese have troops in Jyekundo, but there are no reports of any movement southward."

If the reports were true the news was not wholly bad.

"I am placing a day-and-night guard on the radio station," Ngabö went on. "Please suspend all commercial traffic until further notice. When is your next schedule with Lhasa?"

"I've arranged to have an extra one at ten."

"Good. Can you work two-hourly schedules through the day?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then please arrange it."

Ngabö stopped talking and made me aware that the interview was over.

"Your Excellency," I said, "can I help in any other way? Apart from radio, I mean. If there is anything else I can do—"

"No, thank you, Phodo. Not at present. Everything is being attended to. If there is anything I shall let you know."

There was still something I had to say.

"Your Excellency, the spare portable radio is ready to go out at the shortest notice."

"Good. Please keep the batteries charged."

"They are always fully charged. Either or both of the Indian operators are also in constant readiness to go out."

"Very good. We may need to send the station out at any time." Ngabö stopped again, but still I did not go. Then he smiled. "Would you like me to send the radio to Riwoche now, Phodo?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"You are afraid we shall be cut off in Chamdo?"

"It seems possible that the Chinese will try to cut the Lhasa route."

Ngabö nodded.

"I know the possibility. That is why Riwoche has been reinforced. It is now very strongly held, and there is no sign of Chinese activity in that area. I want to keep the spare radio station here in case anything should go wrong with the other one. I must be in communication with the government in Lhasa. Do not worry, Phodo. We shall win. The gods are on our side."

If they were not it could hardly be for lack of being asked. By the time I returned to the radio station a thin plume of smoke was already rising from the incense burner on the roof of the monastery, and spiritual activity was being intensified

everywhere. People left their work to go round the Holy Walk, turning prayer wheels and counting beads. More prayer services were held, monks muttered more rapidly, and the water carriers quickened their step as they went up the hill. Two men and a woman decided suddenly to make a pilgrimage to Lhasa by prostrations, and set out the same day. Even old Smiler turned a prayer wheel in one hand and manipulated a rosary in the other and yet still managed to put his thumbs up when I passed.

"The gods are on our side," said Tashi, announcing the latest news he had picked up in the town.

"What are you going to do about your wife and children?" I asked bluntly. "And you, Lobsang? We may all have to withdraw from Chamdo. What then?"

"They will come with us."

"Have you got transport for them?"

"We have a pony each for ourselves. For them we can hire—"

"There'll be nothing to hire. I'll go and see Tharchi Tsendron and find out if he can do anything."

Since Rimshi Trokao had left Tharchi Tsendron had taken over as Transport Officer in addition to his other duties. I went to his house.

"Shiwala Rimpoche is to be asked if the Chinese will reach Chamdo," he told me.

"What's going to happen to my clerks' wives and children if they do, Tharchi?" I asked.

"They will have to look after themselves, like all the other officials' wives."

"Most of the other officials have got several ponies. Tashi and Lobsang have only one each. I've got four, but Tenné and Do-Tseten will need two, and I want Tsering to have the other. I'll need one each for the Indians from you—"

"You will need them, and I hope you will have them," said Tharchi Tsendron.

"I must have them."

"Yes, I know you must. But I do not know the position about transport yet. It is being requisitioned from the Residency. Ngabö Shapé has not given me any instructions yet."

"But we might have to leave at any time."

"We might not have to leave at all. Let us see what Shiwala Rimpoche says."

Just then one of Dimön Depön's servants came in haste and asked if I would go to see his master. I went at once, hoping I might get the chance to be of some help now. But Dimön wanted only medical assistance.

"My wife is ill," he said.

No close examination was needed to diagnose her complaint.

"She's going to have a baby," I said.

"Yes, of course." Dimön Depön tried not to sound impatient. "But she isn't well."

I saw his point. A Tibetan woman did not expect a little matter like child-bearing to make her ill. Once at a friend's house a servant waited at table at midday very obviously pregnant, and was of normal shape when she served the afternoon meal—she had had her baby in between.

They had not taught me midwifery in the Boy Scouts, and I did not know what to make of Dimön's wife. But she evidently had a fever, so I promised to send Dimön some medicine for that. Then I had to hurry back for my ten o'clock schedule.

Tashi and Lobsang were not there. I hoped they had gone to try to get ponies for their wives. "They've gone to help cast out the devils," Dronyer told me.

Out of the window I saw about twenty monks carrying

brushwood down the hill. It was unusual to see them carrying anything heavier than a rosary, but they had not far to go. A clearing had been made by the river, and here the monks piled up the brushwood in the shape of a pyramid.

Then the procession came down from the monastery, and I heard the first shots fired since the war began. There were about a hundred monks, including the abbot, in the procession. They came down chanting, while a monk band in the procession played independently: wailing clarinets, clashing cymbals, and booming drums, and the piercing high notes of the conch shells, which were believed to be especially effective in scaring off devils. Every now and then Khambas flanking the procession drowned the other noises by firing their rifles.

They were old muzzle-loaders, such as I had seen in the Imperial War Museum. When they were fired flames and smoke shot out of the muzzles, and the recoil spun the Khambas round like prayer wheels. They made a deep booming sound, which echoed round the mountains for several seconds.

The procession reached the bottom of the hill. Some of the monks were burning incense, and others carried fearsome-looking images made of colored butter. These were the devils. They walked to the open space by the river, and already a crowd had come to watch. I saw Lobsang and Tashi there, together with some of the other Lhasa officials. There was a brief silence as the abbot invoked the gods, and then the bonfire was lighted: more chanting, more music, more gunfire—and then the whole lot together, with everyone shouting and yelling at the top of his voice, as the images were thrown on the burning wood. The noise was deafening as the flames leaped up and burned the cast-out devils.

Lobsang and Tashi came back excited and full of glee.

"Tharchi Tsendron will not be able to provide any transport for your wives and children if we have to leave Chamdo," I said.

I do not think they even heard.

"Shiwala Rimpoche says the Chinese will not come," they told me together.

No doubt Shiwala Rimpoche's statement was good for morale, but it seemed to me that something more Churchillian was needed. Again I felt isolated by my lack of faith in their gods. But there was nothing I could do except carry on with my work and get everything ready for evacuation. Dronyer and Wangda were less gullible—superstitious—devout (I do not know which is the right word) than the others, and shared my view that it was advisable to prepare for the worst in spite of what Shiwala Rimpoche had said. There was not a great deal of work to do, as I had long since gone into the question of what to take and what to leave, and I still could not make final decisions until I knew how much pack transport I would have. We got all our personal belongings ready to pack.

I felt better when I saw Dimön's *rupöns* sending the troops up the river to man the Bren guns behind the stone barricades on the other side of the hill and to guard the bridges leading to the east. I saw that they still had no dynamite. Dimön did not appear, but Khenchi Dawala rode down to encourage the Khamba levies. He was still recruiting them, and about three hundred were available for the defense of Chamdo alone. Others had already been sent to Rangsum, Dengko, Riwoche, and Markham Gartok.

After my midday meal I went to see Khenchi Dawala.

"What is the news?" he asked.

"Nothing from Peking or Delhi." Lhasa did not broadcast

till later in the day. "I didn't expect the Chinese to say anything yet."

"You heard about Gangto Druga?"

"Yes. Ngabö Shapé told me this morning."

"It seems that Khatang Depön has withdrawn from Rangsum," he said. "He is a very good officer. There is a high pass not far to the west of Rangsum, and I expect he will make a stand there. There are several passes like that between Rangsum and Chamdo." Khenchi Dawala paused. "Will Britain come to our help? Or America? The United Nations?"

"I don't know," I said.

"But what do you think?"

There was no point in not telling Khenchi Dawala the truth.

"I think it is unlikely."

"Do you think Tibet alone can beat the Chinese? No, you need not answer that. Of course we cannot. But we can keep His Holiness out of their hands. We are not fighting only for our land, Phodo. That is why we must fight."

Rather strangely, Khenchi Dawala cheered me up. He was not only brave and determined to resist: he was also a realist.

I was not so happy about Ngabö. He seemed a shade too cool and confident, and I did not like what Tharchi Tsendron had told me about the transport. I was still less pleased about the spare radio station being kept idle. I wished Lhalu were back, with Rimshi Trokao as his right-hand man. They had shown they were realists after the fall of Dengko. Things did not look so well organized now.

I was in radio contact with Lhalu's caravan, which had now passed the danger point on the track to Lhasa. They would certainly reach Lho Dzong long before the Chinese could cut the route.

Between schedules I listened to news bulletins from all

over the world. but there was still nothing about the attack on Tibet. Then Radio Lhasa went on the air.

While Fox was away there was no news in English, but I continued to relay the news in Tibetan and Chinese. Horkhang Sé and several other Lhasa officials came to listen that day.

Not a word was said about the invasion.

"I don't understand," I said when it was over. "The Chinese have attacked Tibet. Tibet wants help. Peking is silent for obvious reasons. What on earth can Lhasa gain by pretending the war does not exist?"

No one answered.

I decided to take my news summary personally to Ngabö.

"Radio Lhasa has not mentioned the invasion," I said pointedly.

"The government only heard of it this morning," said Ngabö. "It cannot be announced until it has been decided what we shall say. I will tell you confidentially, Phodo," he added, "that the National Assembly is meeting in Lhasa now."

The National Assembly was evidently having a long session, for Radio Lhasa had no more to say the next day, or the day after that; and the first news I heard of the war was a report broadcast from Delhi on the following Sunday to the effect that the Tibetan delegation in India had denied rumors of a Chinese attack!

I had not heard the rumors, which had begun in the political gossip factory of Kalimpong. It seemed that on Wednesday, even before the first messenger from Rangsum reached Chamdo, a correspondent of the *Statesman* filed a report that the Chinese had invaded Tibet from Tsinghai and reached the pass of Dongma, just north of Riwoche.

The story was obviously false, and All-India Radio quoted

the leader of the Tibetan delegation as saying that it was simply "a belated account brought by traders of a minor incident that occurred four months ago." Probably it was: it could have taken as long as that for news of the Dengko incident to reach Kalimpong, and the geographical error was normal. But for the Tibetan delegation to deny that there had been Chinese aggression several days after the news of the invasion had reached Lhasa could only mean either that the delegation had not been informed or that it had been told to keep quiet.

The actions of the Lhasa government would have been easier to understand if it had intended to offer only a token resistance to the Chinese and then sue for peace, but it was not doing anything of the kind. The resistance was real, and Tibet's subsequent appeal to the United Nations showed that there was never any question of surrender. I could only think it was a matter of habit. The Lhasa government was so used to the policy of saying nothing that might offend or provoke the Chinese that it kept it up after provocation had become irrelevant. It was still trying to avert a war that had already broken out.

What depressed me most was that no one outside Tibet was likely to understand this. When the news came out the obvious interpretation would be that Tibet had no real will to resist.

By Sunday the position in Chamdo had not changed much. Religious fervor was undiminished, and military activity also continued. Some more troops and supplies arrived from Lhasa, and Khenchi Dawala recruited more Khamba. Tharchi Tsendron was still vague about transport. The second portable radio station remained in my charge. Dimön Depön's wife recovered from her fever but was still waiting for her baby. The outside world continued to be unaware that a new

war had broken out, and it was not for me to tell them on amateur radio.

The news from the frontiers was mixed. It was confirmed that Muja had prevented the Chinese from crossing at Dengko. There was no fresh news from Riwoche or Rangsum. From Markham Gartok came a report that the Chinese had crossed the river in force and Derge Sé had surrendered. This was the least important sector of the front, and presumably had not been greatly reinforced; even so, it was a great blow. I had corresponded with Derge Sé ever since I had been at Chamdo, and had come to regard him as one of the best of the Tibetan leaders. There was also the depressing thought that Bull would almost certainly have been captured.

This bad news was confirmed by a report from a detachment of Khamba levies south of Chamdo who had shown their resolution in an unorthodox way. Apparently some of Derge Sé's troops had escaped and fled northward—and had been stopped by the Khambas, who were disgusted by their cowardice and had sent them back to fight.

Markham Gartok was seven days' march from Chamdo, so the Chinese could not be expected from that direction for a little while. But it was evident that Chamdo could not be held much longer, and evacuation became certain on Monday, when we heard the news that Khatang Depön had been routed at Rangsum.

He had not merely lost a battle. He had lost his troops. They had ceased to exist as a united force—and there was nothing else to stop the Chinese on their march to Chamdo.

There was now nearly a panic. Lhasa officials and rich Khambas began to send their valuables up to the monastery, and hired ponies and yaks came in from the surrounding villages. Most of the officials found they were short of trans-

port, and Horkhang Sé, who had a wife and four small children, decided he would not be able to take them to Lhasa and arranged to send them to an outlying village. I suggested to Tashi and Lobsang that they should do the same. Instead, they went to see the local fortune teller.

She was a very old woman, and reputed to have great powers of prophecy. I had also heard rumors that she dabbled in witchcraft, but nothing had ever been proved. The people went to her now because they had begun to doubt Shiwala Rimpoche's assurance that the Chinese would not reach Chamdo, and soon after we heard the news from Rangsum a queue began to form outside her door.

"She says the Chinese will either come within four days or not at all," Tashi told me when he and Lobsang came back.

"Then expect them to come, and send your wives and children out of the town," I advised them.

Pangda Rapga had gone. I had not seen him since the first news of the invasion had come in, but I heard that he had been seeing Ngabö every day. Now he had left with his servants, and gone to the east. He had no chance of getting back to Po without Chinese consent, and it was generally believed that he had gone to try to parley with the enemy, and so hold them up long enough for us to withdraw.

I tried to see Tharchi Tsendron about transport, but he was with Ngabö at the Residency. I called on Khenchi Dawala again to see what he had to say.

"You will be leaving Chamdo now," he said.

"I have not been told anything yet."

"You will have to leave, or you will be cut off."

"Will you come, too?"

He shook his head.

"I am a Khamba, and my place is here. I have lived under the Chinese before, and I shall not be unhappy so long as

the fight goes on. Things are not as bad as they look. The Chinese attacked at the wrong time of the year, and they cannot reach Lhasa before the spring. By then, perhaps, we shall receive help from other countries."

I said nothing.

"We have shown them that we are defending ourselves."

There was still nothing for me to say.

"Haven't we?" he insisted.

"Radio Lhasa has not even mentioned that the Chinese have attacked," I said at last. "The Tibetan delegation has just denied that there has been any fighting."

"It could not have heard yet," said Khenchi Dawala. "It takes time for news to travel."

"Not by radio," I said. "The news was received in Lhasa at eight o'clock on Thursday morning. By nine o'clock it could have reached London, Washington, and every other capital in the world. Now it is Monday, and still nothing has been said. Tibet has not admitted that she is defending herself."

Khenchi Dawala suddenly looked like an old man.

Ngabö sent for me the same afternoon.

"We shall have to leave Chamdo," he said. "The Chinese have begun to attack from Tsinghai."

"When shall we go, Your Excellency?"

"The day after tomorrow. The route will still be safe then. I am arranging for the transport now."

"I have told Tharchi Tsendron what riding animals I shall need," I said. "I shall also need three ponies to take one of the portable radio stations. For the rest of the equipment—"

Ngabö shook his head.

"You will have to destroy that," he said. "I doubt if we shall have enough pack transport even for all our arms and

ammunition, and they must come first. There will not be a yak to spare."

I made a last plea for my clerks' wives and children, but Ngabö waved it aside.

"I cannot spare any government transport for officials' families," he said. "All the requisitioned riding animals will be needed for the troops."

"What will happen to their wives?" I asked.

"They must make their own arrangements. Most of them are only temporary wives, and the soldiers would not want to take them home."

I rode back to the radio station and told the Indians and the clerks the news. Tashi and Lobsang did not complain.

"We shall take our wives out to a village tomorrow," said Lobsang.

I felt sorry for them, although they had only themselves to blame. As government officials they were bound to go with Ngabö, leaving their wives and children to the mercies of the Chinese. But most of the other officials were in the same position, and it was impossible to hire or buy a pony now.

Tsering would come with us on one of my ponies. Wangda asked what belongings she could bring.

"Nothing more than what she can put in the saddlebags," I said. "And she will need them for food. None of us will be able to take any personal luggage."

I had little sleep that night. I now had hourly schedules with Lhasa, and traffic was so heavy that sometimes one schedule ran on into the next. I was at the radio until very late, and arranged to call again early the next morning. In the meantime I charged the batteries, and then went over the radio equipment that I would have to leave behind. I was not going to destroy any of it until I knew for certain what transport I would get, but it had to be ready for quick de-

struction in case we had to move in a hurry. Finally I checked my personal belongings, getting them into some sort of priority in case I would be able to take some.

The next day the news that we were leaving was all over Chamdo. When I reached the Residency I found Khenchi Dawala explaining to a group of monk-robed local officials why we had to leave.

"It is not a question of running away," he was saying. "The troops must retreat in order to continue the fight. If they stay here they will be cut off. The Khamba soldiers must go with them—all able men must go to carry on the struggle against the invaders."

"And what shall we do?" asked one of the local officials.

"We shall stay here. The Chinese will come, but we shall not encourage them to stay. They will be far from their base, and we shall help the Army by interrupting their supplies. We Khambas can hinder and even cripple their power to attack. Great damage can be done to them by small bands both here and on the other side of the river."

It sounded good, and it could have been good if there was anyone to organize the Khambas into mobile detachments of guerrillas and if the Pangda brothers had still been in the fight. But I knew—as Khenchi Dawala knew—that there was no effective resistance movement in Sikang now, and on our side of the river the Khambas who remained would be leaderless and unorganized. I think the local officials knew, too, but Khenchi Dawala was irresistibly inspiring. He alone persuaded Chamdo that we were not deserting the town.

Ngabö confirmed that we would leave the next day. He still seemed cool and confident, although he was evidently worried about transport. Yaks were already being brought in from the villages when I rode back through the town, but there were not many. Army messengers were coming in from

the north, east, and south, and an undercurrent of excitement and fear ran through the town. The queue outside the fortune teller's was twice as long as the day before.

I spent the whole day at the radio station, most of the time on the key. Neither Dronyer nor Wangda was quick enough to be able to help me with the volume of traffic. Tashi and Lobsang took their wives and children to a village, and then came back to their posts. Two hundred monks came down the hill to cast out more devils, and plumes of incense smoke rose from the surrounding hills. No one believed Shiwala Rimpoche's assurance any longer, but the gods were still implored for help.

Late in the afternoon Khenchi Dawala came to see me. He had come to say good-by.

"Will you leave Tibet now?" he asked.

"Not as long as you go on fighting."

"Go now, and tell the world that we are fighting. You are the only one who knows. Tell them we are not Chinese but an independent nation, and want to remain independent and free. Am I asking you to tell more than the truth?"

"No," I said. "I know that all this is true. Yes, I shall tell the world."

"We may lose this war," said Khenchi Dawala slowly. "I know we are not likely to get help now, or even in the spring. I know that without help we are bound to lose in the end. The Chinese are clever and strong. If they could cross the Upper Yangtze they can cross the Salween. If they could beat Changra Depön on the way to Chamdo they can also fight their way to Lhasa. They may occupy the whole of our land. But even if they do our struggle will not have been in vain. This is a war worth fighting to win and even worth fighting and losing; for defeat is not final when the fighting stops."

His voice was low when he spoke of defeat, but now he spoke more strongly.

"We lost against the Chinese in 1910, and they occupied the whole land then," he said. "I was young, and the future looked hopeless; and all round me there were men who said Tibet would never be free again. It would need a miracle. A year later we had that miracle, in the Chinese Revolution. We seized our chance and threw the Chinese out, and for the next forty years we were free. Now the Chinese have had another revolution, and have attacked us again. Why should we think they have had their last civil war? Chiang Kai-shek may attack them from Formosa—he is no friend of ours, but if we also fight these Communists he will want our friendship.

"We should not have become free in 1911 if we had not fought in 1910. If we did not fight now it would be the end of Tibet. We may have to wait longer than last time. For most of the country it was only a year—although in Chamdo we had to wait eight. Next time it may be ten, or fifteen, twenty, fifty, or more; but so long as we remember that they came by force, our will to be free will survive. We shall become free again because the gods are on our side. But tell the world, Phodo Kusho, that we did not run away."

I promised I would. I did not have the chance then, but I am trying to keep that promise now.

10

The Way to Lhasa

AGAIN I WAS TRANSMITTING MESSAGES UNTIL LATE AT NIGHT. I sent the last one at eleven, and then arranged to call again every hour from 4 A.M. The operator at Lhasa was clearly puzzled. Of course we could not talk freely, but from his brief remarks I realized that he did not even know that the Chinese had attacked. The people of Lhasa had still not been told that the war had begun.

I went to bed, and lay listening to the jangle of messengers' bells. Then I heard a pony stop outside the house, and Tenné came and told me the Governor General wanted to see me.

There were pressure lamps in the courtyard of the Residency, and several other ponies were tethered there. Many, like mine, carried a single tassel that showed the rider was a Lhasa official of the fifth rank or below. Ngabö's steward came and showed me into an anteroom, where several officials were standing in groups.

I saw Tharchi Tsendron and went over to him.

"What time are we going?" I asked.

"In the morning, I think."

"What about the transport?"

"I don't know. His Excellency—"

His Excellency called me into his private room.

"We leave in the morning," he said. "You must bring one radio station but nothing else. What transport do you need?"

I repeated my requirements. When I spoke of ponies for the Indians he frowned.

"You will have the transport for the radio," he said. "For the Indians I cannot promise."

"But they must have transport, Your Excellency."

"The soldiers are more important."

"Both the Indians can shoot," I said. I was appalled at the idea of leaving them behind. "If anything happens to me they are the only ones who can operate the radio."

"All right. I shall do my best." Ngabö nodded to a secretary, who was making notes. "But there is not enough transport for everyone. The animals are not coming in from the villages. Everything is going wrong."

The mask was off now. Instead of the cool, self-assured Cabinet Minister I saw only a frightened man. His confidence had been a pose. He had lost control.

In that moment I compared him with Lhalu after the fall of Dengko, and I also felt afraid.

"What time shall we leave?" I asked.

"As early as possible. Wait at the radio station until your transport arrives."

I went back into the anteroom, and there was fear in the faces there too. There is nothing inscrutable about the Oriental in times of stress. I looked for Tharchi, but he had gone. Army messengers were still coming in, and I picked up fragments of news. It was all bad. In the east the Chinese were only one day's march away. In the north they were advancing on Riwoche. They had succeeded in crossing the river near Dengko: Muja had been forced back, but at least he had

fallen back in good order. He was retreating on Chamdo, fighting a rear-guard action to give us time to get out. But even that news was little comfort now.

I saw Khenchi Dawala, and even he looked agitated. He was talking to Dimön Depön, and raised his voice.

"But you must take the Khamba soldiers," he was saying. "You may have to fight to get through."

"It does not rest with me," said Dimön. "Ngabö Shapé says there will not be enough transport for all the troops. My own troops must come first—"

"The Khambas cannot be left," said Khenchi Dawala. "You do not understand what it would mean. They would feel betrayed, and would stop resisting the Chinese. At least some of them must go."

"I shall do what I can," said Dimön. He looked frightened and worried.

Khenchi Dawala left him and went to see Ngabö. Tharchi Tsendron had still not returned. I rode back to the radio station, and sent my servants for the Indians and the clerks. In my own mind I decided that if the worst came to the worst I would give Dronyer and Wangda my ponies and leave Tenné and Do-Tseten behind. Then everything was packed up, saddlebags were filled, batteries recharged, and all the spare equipment stacked up ready for destruction. I burned all the official records and documents and also my private letters and diaries. At three o'clock I went to bed.

At four o'clock I kept my schedule with Lhasa, but there were no messages to send or receive. I continued to call every hour. Then, at half-past seven, Tashi and Lobsang burst in.

"Ngabö Shapé has gone!" they shouted. "Everyone has gone!"

They could hardly talk coherently, but the gist of their

story was that Ngabö and all the other Lhasa officials had left or were leaving Chamdo.

I told them to send for the Indians and to wait at the radio station. Then I removed the crystals from the transmitters, so that they could not be operated in my absence, and rode with Tenné to the Residency.

Already panic was breaking out in the town. People were running about in all directions, carrying or dragging their personal belongings. Monks were hurrying toward the monastery, gabbling their prayers. The stalls in the main street were deserted, and even old Smiler was not at his usual place. I passed Horkhang Sé's house, and it was shuttered and showed no sign of life. Then a small band of Khamba levies came running past, shouting angrily and looking murderous.

By the time we reached the bridge the civil evacuation of Chamdo had begun. Men, women, and children were leaving the town and climbing the hill to the monastery, taking what they could of their household goods. From behind them came the sound of rifle shots.

As we crossed the bridge Tenné pointed up the track that led eventually to Lhasa, and I saw the backs of people walking to the north. Farther in the distance I could make out a few riders going in the same direction.

We rode over the plain at a fast amble, and straight into the courtyard of the Residency. There was no guard at the gate. No servants came to help me dismount. No steward appeared to greet me. I went in by myself, and ran upstairs. The place was deserted. I shouted, and there was no reply.

I ran down to the courtyard again. Tenné had tethered the ponies and was pointing to an outbuilding. It was one of the stores used by the Governor General's bodyguard. An N.C.O. and two soldiers were just coming out.

The N.C.O. saw me and ran across and saluted.

"Where are your officers?" I asked.

"They have gone with the rest of the troops, Sé Kusho. We have been left to destroy the arms and ammunition."

"Has everyone else left?"

"Everyone."

Tenné and I mounted our ponies again and rode back across the plain. The trickle of people going up to the monastery had become a stream. Instinctively I looked up at the hills on the east, half expecting to see Chinese troops on the skyline. Surely they must be very near. As we neared the bridge I heard more shots from the town, and a crackle that sounded like machine-gun fire. Had the Chinese Army arrived, or had infiltrating Communists got into the town? I was riding ahead of Tenné now, as fast as my pony could go. I had to try to destroy the radio equipment and petrol: more important, the Indians and the clerks were waiting for my instructions. At least I had to get Dronyer and Wangda out of this.

A man came riding from the town toward the bridge, and signaled to me not to cross. It was one of Dimön's two *rupöns*.

"Ride away!" he shouted as he came up.

"I must go back to the radio station—"

"You cannot go back. They will kill you if you try!"

"Are the Chinese in the town?"

"Not the Chinese—the Khambas! Ride away, for your life!"

"What has happened?" I demanded.

"The Khambas were left without transport, and now they will kill any Lhasa official—even you. They nearly killed me."

He had stayed behind to destroy the arsenal. What sounded like machine-gun fire was the rifle bullets going off. There were also the dull booms of exploding shells, and smoke was rising from where the arms and ammunition had been stored.

"Where are your troops?" I asked.

He pointed to the Lhasa track.

"All have gone," he said. "All the officials too. The Khambas are looting now. Listen!" I heard more shots fired in the town. "Come, let us ride away after the others."

"I must go and tell the Indians—"

"If you go back you will never come out again."

"I will go, Phodo Kusho," said Tenné. "They will not hurt me."

"It will be safer," said the *rupön*. "But do not go through the town. Go along the river. They will not harm your servant," the *rupön* assured me. "Send him instead if you want to help the Indians."

There was no time for argument.

"All right," I said. "Tenné, tell Dronyer and Wangda to take my two ponies, and come back round the back of the monastery to the next bridge up the river. I shall wait for you there. Tell them or the clerks to destroy all the equipment they can."

Tenné was off. When he crossed the bridge and turned right I wanted to call him back and go myself. I had never felt so unheroic in my life.

"Come on quickly," said the *rupön*. "Look—the Khambas are coming!"

They were running out of the town, about a dozen of them, making for the bridge. They shouted as they ran and fired shots in the air. We rode off up the Lhasa track.

But they were not chasing us. When they crossed the bridge they made across the plain. "They are going to loot the Residency," said the *rupön*. Then we heard explosions from the Residency compound, and I knew the arms and ammunition stored there were being destroyed. I thought how they might have been used for guerrilla activities against the Chinese,

but Khenchi Dawala's plan for Khamba resistance groups could never materialize now.

"Tell me what happened," I said when we were out of danger.

"The Governor General left before dawn," the *rupön* told me. "He took his equerry and secretaries and household staff. The Lhasa officials in the town began to leave as soon as they heard he had gone. The troops left at the same time. There were ponies for some, but many had to go on foot. There was almost no pack transport for the arms and ammunition. For the Khamba levies there was nothing."

"Nor for the radio station," I said grimly. I would have liked to say what I thought of Ngabö, but I managed to control my anger. Even now the *rupön* would have been embarrassed if I had criticized the Governor General. "Do you know why they all left so suddenly?"

"A messenger brought in a report that the Chinese are nearly at Riwoche."

The message must have been over a day old, so Riwoche could have fallen by now. It looked as if we might have to fight our way out.

I stopped at the bridge where I had arranged to meet Tenné and the Indians. The *rupön* saluted and rode on. He wanted to catch up with his troops. I saluted and watched a brave man ride away. He had stayed behind to destroy the arsenal at the risk of his life, after his Commander in Chief had fled.

I was out of sight of both the town and the Residency, and it all seemed like a bad dream. The track was deserted now, and there was not a sign or sound of life anywhere around. I tethered my pony to the bridge and paced up and down. Then I saw a thin plume of smoke rising from the incense burner on the roof of the monastery—the last despairing

appeal to the gods to make Shiwala Rimpoche's prophecy come true. But there was nothing to save Chamdo from the Chinese now.

I waited half an hour. Then I saw two riders approaching the bridge.

Only two! What had happened now?

As they drew nearer I recognized Tenné in front. Then I saw that the other was Do-Tseten.

"The Indians refused to come," said Tenné. "They could not get a pony for Tsering, so Wangda could not come, and Dronyer decided to stay with him. They are going into a village outside Chamdo. Lobsang and Tashi have already gone."

"What about Puntso? There was another pony—"

"Puntso will take the pony. We left him shaving his head."

"Whatever for?"

"He is going to disguise himself as a monk."

We laughed for the first and last time that day. I never met a Tibetan less monkish than Puntso.

As we rode on Tenné told me that the Indians had already begun to destroy the radio equipment, so at least that would not fall into Chinese hands. Do-Tseten said that all the houses of the Lhasa officials in the town were being looted, but the Khambas had not gone to the radio station yet.

Soon we saw people ahead, going on foot. They were soldiers from the garrison, and some were accompanied by their wives and children. A few had yaks piled high with pots and pans and other household goods. Some of the women had babies strapped on their backs. Then we overtook a few officials, and I was delighted to find that one was Tharchi Tsendron.

He had been the last official to leave Chamdo before me. Apparently Ngabö had simply fled without even arranging

the allocation of the little transport there was, and Tharchi had used it to get some of the troops away.

"I thought you had already left," he said.

"I did not know we were leaving." I told him how I had heard the news, and what had happened then.

"I am sorry." He could not say any more without criticizing the Governor General. But he was very quiet.

We were still passing soldiers and their families, strewn out all along the route. They looked tired and dispirited, but they had not entirely disintegrated as a force. N.C.O.'s kept them together as far as possible, and some were even carrying Bren guns. They were not all from the Chamdo garrison: some belonged to Ngabö's bodyguard—he had not even provided transport for them.

Tharchi told me that not all the Lhasa officials were going the same way as we. Horkhang Sé had joined his wife and children in a village outside Chamdo, having resigned himself to capture by the Chinese. The monk Finance Minister had followed his wealth into the monastery, and other officials, monk and lay, had also sought sanctuary there. Dimön Depön had got away with his wife, and they were riding ahead of us. She was still waiting for the baby to arrive.

At four in the afternoon we reached the village of Lamda. It was the last stage on the journey from Lhasa to Chamdo, and I had spent a night in the government resthouse when I came. This was the only building of any size in the village, and when we rode up to it the courtyard was full of ponies. I had been in the saddle for eight hours without food or drink, and went with Tharchi to join the other officials for tea.

I hardly recognized Ngabö. Instead of his usual silks he was wearing the serge robe that normally only junior officials wore, and he looked frightened and miserable. But he still sat on a higher cushion than anyone else, and we had to go

through the formality of paying our respects. He could not have expected to see me again, but he was not quite beaten yet.

"Have you brought the radio?" he asked.

I fought down a sudden upsurge of anger.

"No, Your Excellency," I said. "The transport you ordered for it did not arrive."

Even as I said it I began to feel sorry for him. Only six weeks before he had ridden into Chamdo with all the pomp of an emperor, in brilliantly colored silks and brocades: now he was a fugitive, fearful and wretched, in a drab robe of dark-gray serge.

I did not know then—I did not learn it until five years later—that one of the messages I had transmitted to Lhasa the day before had been a request from Ngabö for permission to surrender to the Chinese, and that permission had been refused.

Tenné brought biscuits from my saddlebag, and I ate them with the tea. There was little conversation. Tharchi Tsendron told me we would have only a short rest, and then ride on over the high pass west of the village.

Then a servant announced that a messenger had arrived.

He came in, bowed to Ngabö, and presented a letter. Ngabö opened it nervously, read it, and then let it fall from his trembling fingers. There was complete silence, and all eyes were on him, as he said:

"The Chinese have attacked Riwoche."

The attack had begun the previous night. The messenger had been sent off immediately. I calculated that if the Chinese took Riwoche at once they could, by forced marches, cut the Lhasa route just before we got through. They had farther to travel than we had, but we had to climb a 15,000-

foot pass. If they were held up for a few hours at Riwoche we could probably beat them to it. In any case they could not reach the track in strength in time to stop us if our troops fought.

I told Tharchi the results of my calculations as we left the resthouse and mounted our ponies again. Ngabö went at the head, and the villagers bowed and stuck out their tongues as his pony, with two tassels to show his high rank, went past. We followed close behind. At the western entrance to the village the track divided to allow travelers to pass on either side of a low wall—a *mani* wall, inlaid with flat stones carved with sacred texts of which the commonest was the eternal *Om Mani Padme Hum*, from which the wall took its name. Villagers were walking round it, turning prayer wheels and telling beads, always going in a clockwise direction to keep the wall on their right; for in Tibet also the left is sinister, and when we rode past we automatically took heed of the popular warning to “beware of the devils on the left-hand side.” It was hardly appropriate, for the Chinese were on our right.

It was about six o'clock when we reached the foot of the pass, and dusk was falling. That meant it would soon be dark, for night comes quickly in Tibet. We were about to begin climbing when a messenger came down over the pass. He did not carry a written dispatch, but had an oral message for Ngabö.

“Riwoche has fallen!” he said.

Apparently the garrison had been outflanked, and Changra Depön had been taken by surprise. This meant that we could hardly hope to get through without a fight. I looked back, and saw that our troops were some way behind. As most of them were on foot they were already very tired. But the *rupöns* still maintained discipline, and all was not lost yet.

The messenger was still being questioned about the fall of Riwoche.

"The Chinese had Khambas with them," he said.

So it was true that the Chinese had recruited Khambas, in Sikang or Tsinghai. Ngabö looked greatly alarmed. The news of his betrayal of the Khambas in Chamdo could not have reached Riwoche, but all Khambas were famous for their swordplay and dislike of taking prisoners, whatever side they were on.

Ngabö hesitated a little longer, and then led the way up the pass.

It was considered a hard climb in daylight, and I doubt if it had ever been attempted by night before. The track was winding and narrow, and soon we had to go in single file. Slippery rocks made the going dangerous in the rapidly fading light, and sudden rocky outcrops threatened to knock us off our saddles. The ponies were tired and could not share the sense of urgency and excitement that overcame our own fatigue. Every hundred yards they had to stop for breath. Progress was painfully slow, and all the time I was thinking of the Chinese riding fast down from Riwoche, gaining on us in their race to cut the track.

But when the light finally failed the goal became survival rather than escape. Tharchi Tsendron, who was riding in front of me, faded to a dim shadowy outline and then merged into the dark. Now I could not even see the track. It was like walking blindfolded on the edge of the precipice, except that the pony did the walking. We were traveling without bells, for better security, and the only sounds were the ponies' hoofs on rock. I sat tensed in the saddle, alert for a fall. Twice my pony stumbled and nearly went down: another

false step could mean a broken bone, and that would probably mean death.

I had started the ascent with Tenné and Do-Tseten close behind, but I had no idea how far away they were now. Even if I could have seen them I did not dare to look back, to make any movement in the saddle that might affect the balance of my exhausted pony as it felt its way up the narrow, winding, slippery track.

At last I could make out the shape of Tharchi again. The moon was coming up, and a faint light was getting through the overcast sky. Then there was a clatter, and Tharchi disappeared, and I nearly fell as my pony pulled up short. An outjutting shelf of rock had caught Tharchi's shoulder, and he was down.

I shouted a warning to Tenné and Do-Tseten, and dismounted and helped Tharchi up. He was only winded, and with a great effort he mounted again and rode on. This time I waited till he was farther ahead. A rider from behind caught me up, but it was not Tenné.

"Did you pass my servants?" I whispered.

"Yes. One of them had to stop to look after his saddlebags. They are all right."

My pony was reluctant to go on, and seemed to have lost its nerve. Then it pawed gingerly forward again, and we continued the ascent. Gradually the light improved, but it was still no more than a slight lifting of the darkness; and it even added to my fears. Now that I could see a little of the track ahead I kept imagining obstacles, especially rocky outcrops, and was continually fighting the desire to rein my pony in. A wave of fatigue overwhelmed me, and I wanted to stop and lie down and sleep.

The wind kept me awake. It was getting steadily colder now. Luckily I was wearing an old R.A.F. wind-cheater

under my Tibetan robe, but there was no cheating this wind. I felt frozen in the saddle. Now I had to stop every fifty yards, for my pony was panting for breath. I had been riding almost without rest for nearly sixteen hours, and I was beginning to suffer from lack of oxygen as well as fatigue. We had come up nearly four thousand feet.

Then at last the track broadened, and I was riding on to a level open space. It was the top of the pass.

I dismounted, and joined the other officials and servants, who were standing together in a group.

"Are you all right, Tharchi?"

"Yes, thanks. But cold."

"So am I."

Ngabö's equerry passed me a flask. It was Scotch whisky, and felt like liquid fire. I whispered my thanks; we were all whispering, and that made it more unreal. Much noise is needed at the top of a pass to scare away the demons that haunt the mountains. But we had other demons to worry about.

I looked at the luminous dial of my watch. The ascent had taken us four hours: it was just ten o'clock. Four-thirty in the afternoon G.M.T.—teatime in England on a Wednesday afternoon, the time for my weekly schedule with Jefferies. At that very moment I knew he would be searching the twenty-meter band for AC4 RF, which had gone off the air forever. Probably my mother or father would be in the room with him, getting more worried and only half-believing him when he spun a yarn about bad radio conditions to try to allay their fears. Perhaps by now they had heard of the war. Lhasa and Peking could not maintain this strange conspiracy of silence indefinitely. Then I remembered that I still had my crystals—not only the ones for the frequencies I used for communication with Lhasa, but also the twenty-meter crys-

tals I used for amateur radio. If we caught Lhalu up I could use them in his transmitter, and put AC4 RF on the air again . . .

"It will take us three hours to get down," said Tharchi Tsendron. "By then the Chinese will have cut the road. Probably they have done so already."

"They won't be there in force," I said. They also would have had to ride by night, and the track south from Riwoche was not as easy as that. "Our troops are not far behind. We can still fight our way through." I felt my revolver, and it gave me more confidence.

More officials joined us from behind.

"The gods have conquered, the devils are defeated," one of them muttered without much conviction. It was the conventional thing to say at the top of a pass, but it should have been shouted out and accompanied by a piercing yell of triumph.

A servant picked up a boulder, and was about to throw it on a cairn of stones when his master stopped him. I noticed the usual cairn and the prayer flags for the first time. They were placed on the top of every pass, and normally no traveler crossed without adding to the pile of stones. Now even religious observances gave way to the need for silence.

Tenné and Do-Tseten had still not arrived when Ngabö led the way down. There was no point in waiting for them, so I followed Tharchi again. "It is not a pony if it will not carry you up a hill," the Tibetan proverb ran, "and you are not a man if you will not walk down the other side." Our mounts had indeed proved themselves ponies, and it would have been suicide for man and beast to try to ride down that steep, slippery track in the dark. Even leading our ponies we often slipped and sometimes fell. My ankles and calves were aching now, and the pain increased with every jolt.

About halfway down we heard another caravan coming up. Ngabö's servants went out to reconnoiter, and found they were reinforcements from Lhasa. There were about thirty men, with mountain artillery and cases of rifles and ammunition. They had not heard of the fall of Riwoche, and were traveling by night to try to reach us before the Chinese attacked. Ngabö told them to throw the loads of arms and ammunition over the side of the mountain and to join our caravan. At least we had some troops with us now.

The descent took three hours, as Tharchi had said it would. When we reached the bottom we mounted again, and rode to the next stage on the Lhasa route. There we had to rest our ponies, and we had tea and biscuits and dried meat. It was only another eight miles to where the track from Riwoche joined the route. With luck we could still get through.

Then a messenger rode in from the next village to the west. "The road is cut!" he shouted.

He did not know the strength of the enemy, but they had arrived only a few hours before. Ngabö had the choice between trying to break through on our own or waiting until more troops arrived.

He chose neither.

"Are they Chinese or Khambas?" he asked.

"Khambas!" replied the messenger.

I caught the shiver of fear that ran through the other officials.

Ngabö talked in whispers to his equerry and secretaries. Then he turned to the rest of us.

"I am going to seek refuge," he said. "There is a monastery near here. The Khambas will not shed blood there."

"Your Excellency," I said with an effort, "is there not still a chance of escape? Their force may be very small."

He looked at me coldly.

"You have my permission to do what you like. Escape if you can. The other officials will come with me."

"You had better come with us if you want to escape," said Tharchi Tsendron.

"Why?"

"You cannot go along the route by yourself—you are bound to be caught. The monastery is to the south, and you may be able to find a way through the mountains to the Salween. There is also a track from the monastery to Chamdo if you want to try for Assam."

"I am afraid that route is hopeless since the earthquake. The Chinese have probably reached Chamdo by now, anyway, and they're bound to be well to the west of Markham Gartok. Getting across the Salween is my only hope." I hesitated. "I suppose you couldn't come, Tharchi?"

"Of course not. I must do what the Governor General tells me."

We rode back along the route a little way and then turned off to the right. Tharchi was right, of course: I had to get off the track, and it would have been foolish to wander about in the dark on my own. Unfortunately I did not know the country at all, as I had come to Chamdo by the northern route, via Nagchu and Riwoche. I had no maps, either—although they would not have helped much, as they showed little detail off the main routes. I knew that the monastery we were going to had not been marked.

In the dark we missed the way, and rode round aimlessly until dawn, when we came on a camp of herdsmen. They were semi-nomadic, and lived in heavy black yak-hair tents with sod walls. They gave us tea and put on a show of humility when they learned Ngabö's rank, although I doubt if a Cabinet Minister had ever been treated with less respect. Then they pointed out the way to the monastery.

We had to ride for another few hours, and now I really felt my lack of sleep. I had been in the saddle almost continuously for over twenty-four hours, and several times I dozed and nearly fell off. My pony was equally exhausted, and rode on with drooping head and stumbled frequently.

At last we reached the monastery, standing at the top of a beautiful wooded valley that I never had time to appreciate. The monks came out and made a tremendous fuss of Ngabö, and looked terrified when they learned why he had come. It was all very well for him to say the Khambas would not shed blood there, but according to past experience monasteries were first choice for blood-shedding by the Chinese.

I unsaddled my pony, and I was shocked by its appearance. I had never seen an animal lose fat so quickly. I gave it a feed and then took my saddlebags into the monastery and ate some biscuits myself. That was all I wanted, for I was beyond hunger now. I was almost beyond trying to escape, and I had to fight off the overwhelming desire to lie down and sleep. I paid a monk to go and look for Tenné and Dotseten, and then made a quick survey of the lie of the land.

I could see the track to Chamdo, and Tharchi Tsendron told me that if I followed it I could by-pass the town on the west. But he shared my view that the country would be impassable where the earthquake had been, and agreed it would be better to make for the west. At least there were no Chinese there yet.

It was useless to make for Lho Dzong, for the Chinese were bound to reach the bridge before I could. My only hope was to cross the river lower down, and if I could not get on to the route to Lhasa to try to cross the Himalayas into Bhutan. The most important thing was to keep well clear of the Chinese, for my features and coloring made it impossible for me to pass as a Tibetan.

There was no track to the west, and none of the other officials had any knowledge of the country round the monastery. I tried to get information from the monks, but they were all muttering prayers at a tremendous speed and would not stop to talk to me. The whole monastery was in a religious fervor as the monks implored the gods to protect them from the dreaded Chinese. The prayer hall was filled with the sounds of bells and drums and human droning, and the stench of rancid butter, incense, unwashed bodies, and fear.

I went out into the fresh air and looked at my pony. It would be impossible to ride it again until it had rested properly. All the other ponies were in the same condition or worse. I would have to walk my pony away, and one or two others if I could take them, and lie up somewhere until the Chinese had come and gone. There was the danger that they would be looking for me, but I might find a hideout in the hills. The question was how long I could wait before I set out. I thought I could risk an hour or two, and I ought to have a little rest first.

Then Muja appeared, coming in on the track that led to Chamdo.

He was riding at the head of about seventy soldiers, a swashbuckling figure with a big Khamba sword in his saddle and a Mauser pistol in his belt.

I hurried to meet him before he reported to Ngabö.

"How many men have you brought?" I asked.

"All my men. Another four hundred coming up just behind. What are you doing here?"

I told him briefly, and outlined my own plan to escape.

"It is impossible," he said. "I know the country here. You will never get through."

"I'm not going to sit here and wait for them to come."

"Of course not. There is no need. The Chinese cannot have

reached the road in strength, and my troops can easily break through to Lho Dzong. Wait here till I have seen Ngabö Shape."

He told his troops to feed themselves and their animals but not to make camp. Then he went into the monastery to see Ngabö.

I felt a surge of new hope. Muja's men had brought two Bren guns, and although they were tired they looked fit and full of fight. I went to the *rupön* in charge and asked him what had happened.

"We had to retreat from Dengko," he said. "The Chinese crossed the river farther north, and were coming down our flank. We fought them off as we fell back toward Chamdo. Then Muja Depön sent most of the men to cover Lamda and keep the Lhasa route open, and rode with the rest to Chamdo."

"When did you get there?"

"Yesterday morning—soon after you left. Muja Depön went to the radio station in case you were still there. There was no one there. Your equipment had been destroyed, but the house had not been looted. It was the only one of the Lhasa officials' houses that the Khambas had not wrecked."

The *rupön* went on to say that the appearance of Muja's troops at once restored order in the town, but no doubt anarchy had broken out again when he left. Then I told the *rupön* what had happened at Lamda and afterward.

"Of course we can reach Lho Dzong," he said. "The Chinese are not unbeatable. We have held them off without many casualties, and unless we are greatly outnumbered we can beat them in a fight. Ah, here come the rest of our troops."

Then I realized how remarkable Muja's orderly withdrawal had been, for the soldiers' wives and children had come too.

The Tibetan Army was not designed for retreat. When troops went to the front line they took their families with them; and with Muja's men now came as many women and children, with all their household goods and personal belongings piled up on yaks and mules. There were tents, pots and pans, carpets, butter churns, bundles of clothes, and babies in bundles on their mothers' backs. It was a fantastic sight. What made it more remarkable was the absence of panic or even anxiety. The women began to unpack at once, pitched tents, lit fires, and brewed tea. They would pack up again when their husbands moved on.

Then Tenné and Do-Tseten appeared. They had missed the track coming over the pass, and when they regained it they almost ran into the Communist troops.

"They are coming after us now," said Tenné.

"How many are there?"

"About a hundred."

"Are they Chinese or Khambas?" another official asked.

"Chinese."

There were groans of alarm from the monks, and the praying rose to fever pitch. Then some of Dimön's troops arrived, also with reports that the Chinese were not far behind. They looked much more weary than Muja's men, but they increased our potential force. I felt sure that the Chinese were only a small mobile unit.

Then Dimön appeared, smiling for the first time for a week.

"It's a boy," he said.

At last Muja came out of the monastery. His face was set and grim.

"Make camp," he told his troops.

I picked up my saddlebags.

"We're not going to fight, then?"

“No. We are going to surrender. I am sorry if I have delayed you. Escape if you can.”

But it was too late. Even as I was about to say good-bye to Muja I saw them in the valley. I turned and looked at the track to Chamdo, and they were there too.

The monastery was surrounded.