This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Robert Dean Carlson (CN 205, T2)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as "ah" or "um" are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

( ) Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[ ] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Christopher Easley and Paul Ericksen and was completed in July 1994.

**Please note**: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

**Collection 205, Tape 2. Oral history interview with Robert Dean Carlson by Bob Shuster on April 17, 1982.**

**SHUSTER**: This is an interview with Mr. Robert D. Carlson by Bob Shuster for the Missionary Sources Collection of Wheaton College. This interview took place at the Billy Graham Center on April 17th at nine o'clock. [Pauses] Mr. Carlson, what comes to mind when you think of Tibet? What's your predominant memory?

**CARLSON**: [Laughs] Oh my! Hard to say what the predominant memory would be. As a kid we lived on the borderline between Chinese and Tibetan population. Part of the time we were in towns where Chinese were predominant and the Tibetans came in as traders. For a few years we were in strictly Tibetan villages and [microphone bumped]. And then, of course, we traveled among the Tibetans also during the summers, even during the years that we were living on the Chinese side of the border. When I say border, of course, it's not a border as it is drawn on a map because the whole area was claimed by the Chinese.

**SHUSTER**: More of an ethnic border?

**CARLSON**: There was an ethnic border, yes, recognized by the local people as being the border between Chinese and Tibetan areas, but shown on the map as all part of the Chinese province of Gansu.

**SHUSTER**: What was the feelings of Tibetans and Chinese towards each other?

**CARLSON**: Mutual (what's the term that I want?)...mutual distaste and contempt. The Chinese called the Tibetans barbarians and the Tibetans looked down upon the Chinese as being a distinctly inferior brand of humanity. The Chinese did some trading among the Tibetans, but it was the Muslims in particular who were the traders, the ones who really ventured out among the Tibetans on trading expeditions. The Muslims got along better with the Tibetans than the Chinese did. I think the Muslims were more adventuresome, more hardy. Somebody told me that the Tibetans, when they attacked an encampment, would listen to the shouts coming from within the encampment, and if the shouts indicated that they were dealing with Chinese, they figured they would have no trouble. If the shouts included cries to Allah, then they knew they were in for a fight.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned if the Tibetans are getting ready to attack a camp. Was banditry a problem?

**CARLSON**: Oh, always. Every Tibetan was a robber or a potential robber. Strangers never traveled among the Tibetans without a guide, an escort, and you always traveled armed. In the early years of missionary activity, the missionaries sometimes traveled unarmed. But after a couple of experiences in presumably peaceful, safe areas, experiences of being robbed, it became a general policy among the missionaries who worked among the Tibetans, that they never traveled alone and they never traveled unarmed.

**SHUSTER**: Well, weren't you yourself wounded by bandits?

**CARLSON**: Those were Chinese.

**SHUSTER**: Chinese, oh.

**CARLSON**: Yeah, that...that was not in Tibetan country. You see, the stranger was fair game. Now, some tribes were more notorious for robbing than others. The Drangwa tribe (and that's commonly spelled D-R-A-N-G-W-A)...the Drangwa tribe was notorious as being lawless robbers. The Tebus, T-E-B-U's...T-E-B-U, Tebus were a pretty wild bunch. The nomads, also they weren't...they weren't at all averse to picking up some goods from stray travelers. In some areas, the area of Ngawa, N-G-A-W-A, the little principality which lies about fifteen days from the border, robbery there was pretty much kept under control. The king just didn't tolerate that sort of stuff. But any...anywhere else it was just part of the custom, part of the culture.

**SHUSTER**: Why do you think it was so predominant?

**CARLSON**: I don't know. It's just one of the ways of showing your manhood, I guess. And sport. Go out and if you see somebody that you think you can handle, why, attack him, rob him.

**SHUSTER**: Where there so many travelers that robbery was profitable?

**CARLSON**: No, no. There were not a great many travelers. Now there were areas where there were caravans...grain caravans and wool caravans and that sort of thing would come [pauses] down the valleys, from the high plateaus down through the valleys to the Chinese border areas. And in there, the tribes, such as the Drangwa or the Tebus, would try to extract toll from those who went through, or if it was a small caravan or lightly defended, why, they might actually try to take it. But it wasn't...it was a sideline, not the main business or the main occupation of the people. But in...in traveling, you were always on the alert. You kept your eyes open. You kept your eyes on people that you were meeting. And you...you kept alert.

**SHUSTER**: Did any of the missionaries or the home board have a problem with this idea of missionaries going armed?

**CARLSON**: There were one or two missionaries who were conscientiously opposed to traveling armed, but they didn't work among the Tibetans. As far as the home board is concerned, I don't know whether the question came up. But among the missionaries who worked with the Tibetans, it was one hundred percent agreement. And, of course, the Tibetans always traveled armed, too. A sword in the belt, and if possible a rifle over the shoulder, or a muzzle loader of...of some sort. That was just a part of your normal attire if you went anywhere. Just like you'd wear a white shirt and jacket and tie if you're going out somewhere on some important occasion.

**SHUSTER**: Do you know if missionaries ever did have to defend themselves or kill someone who was attacking them?

**CARLSON**: The only time that I know of missionaries ever killing anyone was in about 1914, I think. At that time there was considerable turmoil in the area. A bandit known as White Wolf came through, besieged several of the cities, burned the mission station in Min Xian, and most of the missionaries on the field fled to the little mission station of Luba, which was a...it had been a monastery....

**SHUSTER**: That's L-U-B-A?

**CARLSON**: L-U-B-A or L-U-P-A...been a monastery, which had financial problems, had gone bankrupt, and the property had been sold to the mission. There were two large buildings on the property, a chanting hall and an idol house. The chanting hall was torn down and a small chapel erected on the site. The large timbers from the chanting hall were floated down the Tao River to Titao and used in construction of the Titao church [Mr. Carlson later noted that in 1996, the town was called Lintao]. They were big massive timbers. And some of the carved woodwork from the chanting hall is now in the Field Museum in Chicago.

**SHUSTER**: You can go over there and see little...remind you a little bit of home.

**CARLSON**: Yeah. The idol house had a two story idol in it. That was...the idol was torn down and destroyed and the house was converted into a missionary residence. But anyway, at the time that the missionaries were there, a large band of Tebus got together to attack the mission station. There were rumors of a large amount of silver buried somewhere on the monastery grounds. That and the idea, "Well, here's a time where we could wipe out the whole mission group at one fell swoop," apparently inspired the Te...Tebus, but perhaps more the silver than anything else. So a large group, I don't know how many, perhaps a couple of hundred, got together and attacked the mission station one night. And [pauses] the missionaries had some warning, a couple of hours, perhaps, that the attack was coming, and they had guards posted.

**SHUSTER**: They got a warning from friendly Tibetans?

**CARLSON**: A Chinese woman in a village a number of miles away, as I understand the story, who could understand Tibetan, heard...saw this large party of Tibetans, and heard them talking and gathered that that was what they were doing. So she pretended that she was going up to the flour mills, got a flour sack and dusted herself with flour so that she just looked like some woman going out to the...to the mills somewhere, and came to Luba to the mission station and reported what was going on. And at that time, the...the missionaries were alert, which, of course surprised the Tebus. They weren't...they weren't expecting that anybody would be aware of their coming. And they fired a few shots, I don't know how many, but one of the...one of the men apparently [clears throat] actually fired at the Tebus rather than...rather than in the air, and killed one of them. But that's the only occasion that I know of that missionaries ever fired actually at the people. Bob Ekvall has shot a horse out from under an attacker. But the situation where you're actually in a gunfight [sound of passing train] with robbers did not come up, because the robber will count the number of men that he's dealing with and the number of firearms that he is facing and decide whether or not it's worth it.

**SHUSTER**: Question of deterrent.

**CARLSON**: Yeah, yeah, deterrent force. And you see, what we carried were rifles and shotguns, things which were readily visible, not sidearms. So....

**SHUSTER**: Which [?] you only use close anyway.

**CARLSON**: Yeah. So that from...oh, from the time I was six, I guess, whenever we traveled I carried a twenty-two. It wouldn't do very much, but it...it was there and it looked like a...looked like a rifle, looked like a firearm, added one more to the...to the number.

**SHUSTER**: What missions were working in Tibet besides CMA [Christian and Missionary Alliance]?

**CARLSON**: In our area, the C and MA, the Swedish Pentecostals had one family working among the Tibetans, the Assemblies of God had one family...one man, James Vigna, who worked among the Tibetans.

**SHUSTER**: That's V-I-G....

**CARLSON**: V-I-G-N-A. I understand he is still living out...out on the West Coast. He spoke...he spoke Tibetan and traveled among them. Then there was also Will Simpson, who traveled probably more widely than anybody else, knew more about the Tibetans and their customs and their culture than anybody else. There would be a fascinating person to research if one could ever find the information on him.

**SHUSTER**: He...what did you say? Assemblies of....?

**CARLSON**: Will Simpson.

**SHUSTER**: Assemblies of God?

**CARLSON**: Yes, Assemblies of God. He's mentioned in a book which came out in recent years about twentieth century martyrs. His family, W. W. Simpson, [William Wallace Simpson, 1869-1961] his father, was one of the early missionaries, started out with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, then I believe went with the Assemblies of God [ca. 1913. See Joanna Lee's article in the Spring 1994 issue of the *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter*].

**SHUSTER**: Were they related to the family of A. B. Simpson?

**CARLSON**: No, no. And Will grew up there, had his education in the States [microphone bumped] I believe and then went back, decided that work among the Tibetans was no place for a woman, so he decided that if he was going to work among the Tibetans, he was going to have to be a bachelor. And he...he traveled extensively; I don't know that anybody knows all the places that he went to because he'd go out with a caravan...with his caravan, traveling like the Tibetans, and

living among them and he...he was the first Westerner in who knows how many tribal areas. He was killed by Chinese bandits in the early thirties.

**SHUSTER**: In China?

**CARLSON**: In China, yes. [Pauses] I don't know what he ever wrote in the way of reports. He has a sister who is still living. She is quite advanced in years. I think she's probably in her nineties. And, of course, his cousin is Bob Ekvall. And what other relatives he might have, I don't know. But where one could find anything of what he did, I don't know.

**SHUSTER**: Do you know where his sister lives?

**CARLSON**: Yeah, she lives in New York.

**SHUSTER**: New York City.

**CARLSON**: Yeah. I have her name and address. Simpson also traveled with the *National Geographic* writer, Joseph [F.] Rock. Rock traveled in China in the 1920s. He started out in Southwest China. He was basically a botanist, and he was looking for plants which might possibly help in treating of leprosy. He had a number of articles in the *Geographic* about Yunnan Province, and then coming north from Yunnan until finally he ended up in Gansu, and has...he has articles about Jone, where my folks were living at the time, and he also had the idea that he wanted to get to the mountain known as Amne Machin. He traveled...he got Will Simpson to travel with him as guide [microphone bumped] and interpreter, and I don't know how long Will was with him. Rock never mentioned Simpson by name. He spoke in the article a couple of times of my American interpreter, and Simpson appears in one of the photographs in the article. But he's unidentified and he's in Tibetan clothing, so that you're really not aware that you're looking at a Westerner. [Train passing in background] But at that time they traveled along the Yellow River in areas where they could see Amne Machin, but were never able to get close to the mountain.

**SHUSTER**: What's...what is the significance of the mountain?

**CARLSON**: The mountain is a sacred mountain to the Tibetans of the area, and for...for a time, there were people who thought it was higher than Mount Everest. One of those mystery mountains that you could see from a distance, but couldn't get near. Rock wasn't sure how high it was. He had no equipment for measuring it. Shortly after World War II, there was an American fellow who made an expedition to that area. He gathered together all of the information that he could find, the rumors and so on, about this mystery range of mountains, and he made some measurements which he felt indicated that it was several hundred feet higher than Everest. Let's see what....? His name was Leonard Clark. He wrote a book, I think he called it *The Marching Wind*. Most recently, within the last year or so, there was an article in the *National Geographic* by a couple of Americans who visited the area and actually climbed the mountain and they measured it at something over twenty thousand but not nearly as high as Everest. So...so that magnificent mystery has been dispelled.

**SHUSTER**: If we go back to the missionaries in Tibet. There was Assemblies of God, the Swedish Pentecostal, CMA, of course.

**CARLSON**: The CIM [China Inland Mission] had a couple of people further north than we were, who did some work among the Tibetans. Then down south in the Sichuan and Xikang Province. There were others, but we had no contact with the people down there. [Mr. Carlson noted in 1996 that Xikang existed as a separate province for only a few years before being split between Sichuan an Xizang (Tibet).]

**SHUSTER**: What...how did your parents go about evangelizing in Tibet? What was their...what was their method?

**CARLSON**: The method for getting anywhere was to get a friend through an introduction from a mutual friend. That was the only way that you could operate. When they...in 1929, or thereabouts, when they first went over beyond the mountains to Tibetan...to Tebu country, the introduction was through a trader, who was a Christian. He introduced the missionaries, my parents and others, to his host and sponsor in the Dragsgumna area. And then that host and sponsor can introduce you to someone that he knows in the next village or the next tribe, and so on. That's...that's the way you go. And once you have been formally introduced to somebody and have made this acquaintance and this friendship, then there is a mutual obligation. You look out for his interests and be his sponsor when he is in your village, or your territory, and he is your sponsor and protector when you are in his area. And the more notable a sponsor you have the better off you are. So that's...that's the way that you could go from one area to another. Very seldom could you travel, to any extent, without sponsors or hosts and guides. It just wasn't done. As far as presenting the Gospel is concerned, the Tibetans were very religion centered. Religion was not a taboo subject, and the idea of speakers of religion, why, that was perfectly acceptable. The idea that people would come as speakers of religion from someplace else, why, that's...that's fine, that's the...the thing to do.

**SHUSTER**: People would come and just start addressing the crowd, or how would they...how would they talk?

**CARLSON**: More likely, the crowd would gather around the funny-looking foreigner. And, of course, we were very funny looking with the light skin and blue eyes and yellow hair. Some of the demons were pictured as having blue eyes and yellow hair, and....

**SHUSTER**: Doubtless you had an accent, too.

**CARLSON**: Yes, looking strange, originally, dressing in strange ways, although later all the missionaries when traveling among the Tibetans wore Tibetan dress.

**SHUSTER**: In presenting the Gospel, was there an attempt to adapt it to Tibetan life? Were certain themes emphasized that made it more immediate? How...how did you...how did you begin to...to preach? What did...what was the starting point presenting Christianity to people who had not heard it before?

**CARLSON**: I'm really not too sure there. Christianity and Tibetan religion are poles apart. Tibetan religion emphasized reincarnation, the endless grind and the building up of merit. Build up merit on this life, in hopes that it will shorten your passage through hell and you will be reincarnated on a higher plain in the next existence. So everything, a person's whole life was involved with building up of merit. The prayer beads which every person carried, the rosary, [microphone bumped] which was constantly thumbed whenever...whenever it wasn't...one wasn't doing anything else or whenever one had a hand free, even while...while carrying on a conversation or doing something else, if one had a hand free, one could take that rosary and...and thumb it. The prayer wheel, the little cylinder on a handle with a weighted thong around it that you would twirl, you could have one hand twirling that thing while you're talking or doing business or anything, just keep one hand busy twirling that prayer wheel. And then, of course, pilgrimages to sacred spots. Walking around a lamasery, or a sacred shrine, or prostrating yourself, going around the monasteries in...in prostrations. You lie down, and where your fingers reach is where you put your toes the next time. You lie down, you mark the dust, you walk forward three steps, lie down, and just sort of measure the length around the lamasery, but with your prostrations for merit. Giving of gifts to monks or beggars or pilgrims was...would increase merit. Saving life would build up merit. All kinds of things would build up this merit for life to come. And, of course, Christianity: one life, no building up of merit, salvation is not something which you earn, but as a gift, totally, totally foreign to the Tibetan idea, and very, very difficult for them to accept. The [pauses]...I'm not sure what...what it was that brought Tibetans to Christ. The burden of sin, of course, was very, very real to them. They were constantly aware of sin.

**SHUSTER**: Because of their religion?

**CARLSON**: Because of their religion. But the problem came in what to do about this sin. And the...the Christian message was totally foreign and totally strange to them. It was a...a solution to the sin problem which was totally beyond anything that they could imagine. So that...that was a barrier which had to be gotten past. The idea of salvation as a gift, not something which is earned.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned that people were very willing to listen to...to different religions. How did Tibetans react on the apparently rare occasions when a Tibetan was converted and did become a Christian? Did that affect his standing in the community one way or another?

**CARLSON**: [Clears throat, pauses] The Tibetans were slightly more tolerant than the Muslims were. The man with whom we lived first in Dragsgumna in Tebu country became a Christian after we had been there a number of years. His wife made life very difficult for him, but I don't know that there was any great difficulty from his fellow villagers. In the Drangwa tribe there were three who became believers, and I don't know that there was what you call persecution there. There was pressure to join in the community religious observances. [Pauses] Opposition would probably come from the religious establishment, from the lamaseries.

**SHUSTER**: Why would that be?

**CARLSON**: A challenge to...to them and their position. The...the problem of converts very, very seldom came up.

**SHUSTER**: How...it must have been rather discouraging then to work in Tibet?

**CARLSON**: It was. It was. I've...I've heard the...the story of my mother coming back to the States after, I guess it was about a six or seven year term. Her older sister was a missionary in Cameroon, French Africa. And just about that time in the...1930 or thereabouts, there was great revival in Cameroon with thousands of people turning to Christ. And she and her sister were here on furlough at the same time. Her sister was telling tales of these thousands of people coming to Christ. And mother: one. One person. One man on the last night that they were there.

**SHUSTER**: Did you hear.... Was there in Tibet enough community...enough believers in any one community to form a church...to form a community of Christians?

**CARLSON**: The only place where something like that took place was in the Drangwa tribe. You may have this story on Bob Ekvall's interview where....

**SHUSTER**: About the tribe that used....

**CARLSON**: ...started with three, and then grew until a majority of the village was believers. That is the only place that I know of. Nowhere else that I'm aware of were there any sizable number of Tibetan believers. There were so...there were Tibetan believers here and there, particularly in the border areas or where you had a mixed group, a mixed Chinese and Tibetan population. But in purely Tibetan areas, I'm not aware of them.

**SHUSTER**: What was the place of the monasteries or lamaseries in Tibetan life?

**CARLSON**: Dominant. Every family was supposed to give at least one son to the priesthood, and support the lamasery with gifts and offerings and so on. I think the estimate runs as high as one third of the Tibetan men were in the monasteries, and there were huge establishments in some areas. Labrang had several thousand monks. Kumbum near Xining in Qinghai Province, had thousands. And then, of course, there were smaller establishments everywhere, ranging from, I suppose, a few dozen to a couple hundred. But ev...everywhere there were the...the priests and the lamaseries.

**SHUSTER**: Were they the political as well religious dominant group?

**CARLSON**: To a great extent, yes. They were very heavily involved in politics. Tribes would be affiliated with a lamasery. That would be their religious center. And the...the monks, the lamas would be heavily involved in the politics of the area and the tribes that were connected with them. They would build up considerable stores of wealth from gifts from the people and charges for holding chanting services and so on. They'd...they'd go out to...to an encampment, for example, and have a big chanting service for several days, and, of course, all of their food and so on would be supplied while they were there, plus a healthy gift to the wealth of the lamasery. So they...they built up a considerable amount of wealth in the process and power and prestige.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned a little earlier that a king in a particular area managed to keep down robbery in his...in...at least in his kingdom. Did the kings co-exist with the monasteries, or was there a king in one area ruling and a monastery in another area ruling?

**CARLSON**: There there was the royal house, as well as the lamasery. I'm not sure which establishment had more power. I think perhaps the king did, just slightly more, so that he would...he could dominate somewhat more than the priests and to some extent limit their power.

**SHUSTER**: So there were secular kings apart from the monastery?

**CARLSON**: Yes, kings or tribal chieftains. Yes, definitely. Within...within a tribe, there were the headmen, [in] a few areas those that were called kings.

**SHUSTER**: Was there any kind of nominal or real authority over all Tibet?

**CARLSON**: Nominal only. The Dalai Lama and his court. He would be the supreme ruler, and of course, he was a religious...religious ruler. But he was so far away that he was the almost mythical figure that you might see once in a lifetime if you could manage to take a year off and go on pilgrimage to Lhasa. But he exercised no real control over the outlying areas where we were. The...the relationship of the religious and secular authorities [pauses] probably varied from one area to another. I thi...one study that has been made of that would be a book co-authored by Bob Ekvall on the principality of Saga in western Tibet, where he studied the social and political organization of this area, studied it in...in depth. [*A Tibetan Principality: The Political System of Sa sKya* by C.W. Cassinelli and Robert Ekvall]

**SHUSTER**: Did...did you or your parents get to know any of the lamas...any lama fairly well?

**CARLSON**: Yes. We knew the Labrang lama, the...I don't know about Dragsgumna, where we lived for a while. In Jone...I don't remember anything about the lama in Jone. But in...in some areas, in some of the places, yes, the missionaries did know the lamas.

**SHUSTER**: Were...you mentioned that there was opposition from monasteries to conversion. Was that the only attitude of lamas towards Christianity or were there other...were some curious about Christianity or friendly?

**CARLSON**: Curious, [bumps microphone] but absolutely convinced that anything aside from their own beliefs was hardly worth investigating. Certainly not worth considering.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned some of the more ritualistic practices like the prayer wheels and the rosaries. What about theological and ethical content in Tibetan religion?

**CARLSON**: Theological or ethical content. [Pauses] Extremely complicated, hairsplitting theology. Lamaism is sort of a branch of Buddhism with ideas and practices brought in from religions which existed in Tibet before Buddhism came along. So that what you have in Lamaism is not pure Buddhism, but a mixture. Many, many kinds of spirits, malevolent spirits in everything.

In the springs, in the ground, in the air, all...all of them generally hostile, and having to be appeased or certainly not offended. Pollution of a spring, for example, by...by blood was a horrible offense to the spirit of the spring. Digging in the ground would offend the gods of the...of the earth, so that the nomads looked down upon the village Tibetans as definitely an inferior grade, because they...they dug in the ground for their...for their planting. The odor of burning meat was regarded as highly offensive to some of the spirits, the spirits of the mountains and so on. So that there were myriads of these spirits that you had to look out for and that you had to appease. Ethically, [pauses] well, just about anything went. Killing, of course, was regarded as a great sin, but on the other hand the Tibetans were [laughs] some of the greatest meat-eaters in the world. But they didn't kill the small things. A life was a life, and you balance the sin of taking a life against the benefit that you get from that sin, and if the benefit outweighs the sin, why, go ahead and sin, go ahead and take the life.

**SHUSTER**: Benefit to yourself?

**CARLSON**: Yeah, in the way of food, for example. Killing a sheep or killing an ox, well, you get lots...you get leather there and you get meat there. So it's a sin to kill it? Well, the value outweighs the...the sin. Now a smaller animal, the value wouldn't come up to the sin, so you leave them alone - seemed to be the attitude. Of course, they would get around the taking of life by various subterfuges. Smear...smear a sheep's nose and mouth with mud, or tie a leather garment over its head, and the animal just happens to...

**SHUSTER**: Suffocate.

**CARLSON**: ...suffocate. It happens to stop breathing. Well, you didn't really...you didn't really kill it, but as long as it stopped breathing, why, you can't let it go to waste, so you go ahead and butcher it. Some...some use that sort of a way of getting around the problem of killing. Killing of a man was again a very, very serious matter. There was a definite system of atonement, atonement money paid to the relatives. It could wipe out an awful lot of merit, killing a man.

**SHUSTER**: Was that money for atonement or to buy off vengeance or....?

**CARLSON**: It did both. It atoned for the loss of life, and when the affair was settled, then the...the feud was supposed to come to an end. And it...it could be settled by the...really, mediation of the religious authorities, representatives from the two sides with orators, who would give endless speeches setting forth their claims and the precedents and so on, and then the mediators could suggest a settlement. They could not impose a settlement. There was no binding mediation. It had to be agreed to by both sides. And if both sides agree, then the atonement money could be paid and the affair would be regarded as settled.

**SHUSTER**: So I imagine parties went to mediation only if there were of roughly equal strength?

**CARLSON**: Yes, or if there were some overriding reason. If you had a feud, for example, with a group through whose territory you had to pass on your trading trips, there you needed to do

something about it. If your blood feud was with a remote tribe that you never came in contact with, then skip it.

**SHUSTER**: Did...what was CMA's strategy for evangelizing Tibet? How did they...what was the method that they felt would be most effective?

**CARLSON**: Live among the Tibetans and try to win converts through day...daily contact with them. Now, our Tibetan stations, or stations where there were Tibetans nearby: Labrang, which had the very, very large lamasery. There was also a trading post where there were Chinese and Muslim traders, a mixed population. There was a mission station there and there were Chinese believers. Maybe one or two Tibetans, I'm not sure. Hezuo was, I think, almost entirely Tibetan. I don't know whether there was a trading post there where Chinese came or not. There was a missionary family living there. And there may have been a few Chinese believers, I'm not sure. In Tebu area where my parents lived, there were no believers and there it was just a matter of day by day friendship and making of contacts and day by day witness. Same thing with Lhamo where Ekvalls were. Day by day contact with anybody that was around, travel among the Tibetans, making friends. And, of course, the question always was, "Well now, why are you here?" "I'm here as a speaker of religion." "Oh, oh. Well, what religion? What...what about it? What do you have to say?"

**SHUSTER**: Did you...what classes of people did you come into contact with?

**CARLSON**: I would say just about everybody. There...as far as I know, there were no great differences as far as classes of people are concerned. In the Tebu villages, I think everybody was just about on a par. There, of course, would be village headmen and tribal headmen. In the...in the tribes, the nomads, there would be the recognized headman of an encampment. The...of course, the priests were a separate category. In Ngawa, there were the ordinary people, and then there was the ruling family, and there were good relations with the ruling family there. But I don't think you could say that in that part of Tibet there clear cut class distinctions, scholars and ordinary people, or upper-class and lower-class. The feeling was that there was pretty much equal. Some with more wealth than others, of course.

**SHUSTER**: What were the major bases of the economy? How did most people support themselves?

**CARLSON**: Among the village Tibetans, it would be by farming. Among the nomads, the entire basis of their economy was their flocks and herds, their sheep and cattle. They grew nothing. They were up above...at an altitude where no agriculture was possible. So they would support themselves from their herds of oxen, sheep, in some areas horses. And the oxen and sheep would supply clothing, the sheepskin garment. The hair of the ox would be woven into cloth for the tents. So shelter came from the cattle. The wool could be sheared from the sheep and either taken or sent to the border trading posts, and traded for the grain, which was necessary for their staple grain food, *tsamba*, ground...ground up...ground up barley...barley flour. But their whole livelihood depended upon their flocks.

**SHUSTER**: Did the tribe own the entire flock or was it individuals keeping their flocks together?

**CARLSON**: Individuals, I think. The tribe would move as a tribe, but I think the animals were all individually owned, family owned.

**SHUSTER**: What about the...the farmers in the villages? Was that also individual, or was it communal, serf or....?

**CARLSON**: I don't know about actual ownership of land. The fields would have been worked individually. But [microphone bumped] what kind of land ownership concept they had, I don't know.

**SHUSTER**: Did the lamaseries own land?

**CARLSON**: Yes, I believe so. I think they had large holdings of land.

**SHUSTER**: And that's how major [?] they supported themselves along with gifts?

**CARLSON**: That and...and gifts. The lamas did not actually work the land, or the...the...the priests. The la...la...lamas didn't do [laughs]. Lamas didn't do anything. The priests, I don't believe actually worked the land. But the...the lamasery, I believe, owned...owned land.

**SHUSTER**: They had...they hired people to work the land or they had serfs or....?

**CARLSON**: That I don't know.

**SHUSTER**: What reflections do you have on the Tibetan language, as compared to say the Chinese?

**CARLSON**: I spoke very, very little of it, just a few words. It's supposed to be the same language family, but, of course, the two languages are mutually unintelligible. There is...in the border areas there is some borrowing back and forth of terms a little bit. But Tibetan is not a tonal language as Chinese is. It's written with an alphabet borrowed from Sanskrit, and regarded by people who learned both as being much more complex grammatically, much more difficult from that standpoint, than Chinese is.

**SHUSTER**: Were most of the Tibetans literate?

**CARLSON**: No, no. Very, very low literacy rate. Some of the monks could read to some extent, sound out the words. The spelling system is complicated. They could sound out the words, not necessarily could they understand what it was that they were reading. The one area where that was different was in Ngawa, where the literacy rate was much higher than in any other area that our missionaries ran across. There even some of the laymen were able to read.

**SHUSTER**: Was that again because of the king?

**CARLSON**: Apparently.

**SHUSTER**: Were...what about the general health of Tibetan people?

**CARLSON**: Survival of the fittest.

**SHUSTER**: And how fit were the fittest?

**CARLSON**: The fittest were magnificent specimens, strong, muscular, tough people. The birthrate was very, very low, particularly among the nomads. Population was probably declining. But there were...there were problems, of course. I think ulcers were fairly prevalent. Among...in...in some areas venereal disease was very, very widespread because they're totally promiscuous. What else? Goiter. In some of the...some of the tribal areas...some of the village areas, goiters were very, very common. Eye trouble, trachoma, I think, was common. But I don't...I don't know what the life expectancy was. I believe you would find people in their sixties, maybe in the seventies, I'm not sure. But the...the typical nomad was a strong, husky fellow, tough.

**SHUSTER**: How about the women?

**CARLSON**: Same thing. They did the work. An awful lot of it.

**SHUSTER**: What was the status of women?

**CARLSON**: Among the Tibetans, the...the women were, I think, almost equals. A Chinese person along the border might take a Tibetan wife. A Tibetan would never ever have a Chinese wife. The...the Tibetan woman could work. The Chinese woman was looked upon as...by the Tibetans as being absolutely useless. So the...the women would work in the fields among the nomads. The women would have a lot of say in management of the flocks. They took care of the churning of the butter. They took care of the weaving of the cloth for the tents. They had a lot of responsibility, they did a lot of work, and I think were...had a...had a rather high position compared with the Chinese woman.

**SHUSTER**: Where there female priests or nuns, or any involvement in the religious life?

**CARLSON**: There may, here and there, have been women nuns. I never ran across any. In...in religious things now, the woman was looked upon as an outsider. The monk was not supposed to have anything to do with women. He was...he was supposed to be celibate. And killing would take a man away from the priesthood. He would be a renegade. Or being with a woman would also.

**SHUSTER**: You mean killing another man, or killing a....?

**CARLSON**: Yeah, killing another man, yeah. Sex or murder were the two big things which would take a man out of the priesthood. The...the lama now, he could be married because a lama is a lama, no matter what he does, by virtue of his birth. A priest, a monk is a monk by having been dedicated

to the monkhood, and he can fall from that, or he can leave that. But a lama is a lama no matter what he does.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned earlier the attack of...of...from the Tebu tribesmen on a mission station. Where Westerners unpopular in Tibet? Where they popular or no re...no particular reaction as a class or... [bumps microphone].

**CARLSON**: They were looked upon as curiosities, and there were different attitudes. Some areas or some individuals were hostile to outsiders of any sort. In Dragsgumna, I think, my parents were accepted. Denga, where they went later, was a very difficult situation. That's where the landlord rented them the house in order to spite all of his neighbors.

**SHUSTER**: Sounds like my hometown. [Carlson laughs, microphone bumped]

**CARLSON**: In [pauses]...in general, they were, well, these queer outsiders, strangers, foreigners.

**SHUSTER**: Where they perceived as being different from the Chinese or were all...

**CARLSON**: Oh yes.

**SHUSTER**: ...outsiders lumped together?

**CARLSON**: Oh yes, they were...they were different from the...from the Chinese.

**SHUSTER**: Was there much of an awareness of nations like the United States or....?

**CARLSON**: None whatsoever. None whatsoever. The world as I understand it was regarded as in...built in layers. The top layer, of course, was Tibet, and outside of Tibet, who knows what there was. In the area where...where we were, of course, China was known because of contact with Chinese. There was a somewhat legendary place known as Russia, because occasionally you could get...you might run across goods of Russian manufacture, a Russian rifle or something like that. Mongolia was known because Lamaism extended into Mongolia, and there would be occasional Mongolian lamas. Another sort of semi-mythical place was India. Coral and amber, that sort of thing could come from India. But beyond that, the world was just a vague...a vague blur where all kinds [microphone bumped] of strange things could...could be found.

**SHUSTER**: I know that in the Middle Ages, in the Levant, the...all Europeans were called Franks. That's even common today I think. Was there one name for Westerners in Tibet? If somebody asked you where you were from, what did you say?

**CARLSON**: I think the...the general term just would have been just simply foreigner. And whether it was an American or a Briton or a Swede, or whatever, that would be...it would make no difference whatsoever. The difference in terms wouldn't be...wouldn't be known. Now [microphone bumped] the same thing was true among the ordinary Chinese of the area, too. What

there was, outside of their own province or even less than that ev...their own little area was unknown.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned that there was some knowledge of Russia. Was there any...did any knowledge of Marxism penetrate into Tibet at all?

**CARLSON**: No, no, not at the time that we were there. There were a few Russian traders, people who had fled from Russia after the Russian Revolution, or during the purges of Stalin's area. Well, no, they would have...they would have left before that. We knew a couple of families of Russians, and they...they traveled among the Tibetans trading for furs.

**SHUSTER**: You mentioned traders several times, and you just said now they're trading furs. What were the main things that traders...what were the various terminuses of their route? Who were they serving as go betweens between?

**CARLSON**: They would travel in areas where they had friends. They would make an arrangement with the host in the tribe, and once a year or so, they'd...they'd come, they'd pick up what he could give them as far as lambskins or sheepskins or wool. From the outside the Tibetans would get barley...

**SHUSTER**: The outside being China?

**CARLSON**: Yeah. ....tea, because see, their...their staple, aside from meat, milk, cheese, butter, would be barley flour and tea mixed together into a sort of a putty-like consistency. So tea, barley, such things as dried onions, a dried fruit, a red fruit which dried into a very wrinkled, something like a prune, but prunes that we have are moist. But these...these are dry. Ah, let's see. Cloth sometimes, but not a great deal of that. From the Tibetans you would have wool, lambskins, horses from some areas where they raised horses, furs, fox, or wolf, or martin. Something else. [Pauses] Oh, deer's horn. Sometimes the musk...musk pod of musk deer.

**SHUSTER**: And these were taken to Gansu?

**CARLSON**: These were taken to...to Gansu to the...to the trading areas. [Bumps microphone] Oh, from the outside world also would be firearms, rifles and ammunition.

**SHUSTER**: Were Bibles available in Tibet, in Tibetan language, I mean.

**CARLSON**: The whole Bible was not available at the time that we were there. It is now. The New Testament was, and the Gos...Gospels were printed separately in little booklets. Those we had. Then there were a couple of other small booklets on Christianity. The trouble with literature was that so few people could read. In 1940, we traveled to Ngawa with the Ekvalls, and at that time we gave away large.... Well now, I don't...I don't know what large is. It's a totally relative term. But many, many more copies of the Gospels than in any other area because the people there could read. So a fairly large number of Gospel portions were left there. In other areas, it would be, maybe

some monks would be able to read, and would accept Gospel portions. But the ordinary people couldn't do anything with it.

**SHUSTER**: Sure. What about things then such as postcards or illustrations of some kind, illustrated tracts. Were they used at all?

**CARLSON**: Among the Tibetans, no.

**SHUSTER**: Were the various missions that were working Tibet...what was the relationship between them?

**CARLSON**: In our area, there was some tension between the C and MA and the Assemblies of God because of the split which took place there. The problem very seldom came up because there were very few Assemblies of God people with whom we came into contact. With...with Vigna, of course, our mission stations were open to him whenever he...whenever he came through the area. The Swedish people, Albert Carlsson and his family, again, very seldom was there contact, but whenever he came around, there was good, good relationships there. Oh, one other group that was there. One...one family near us were the Seventh Day Adventists, but he didn't work among the Tibetans. His was.... I don't know that he spoke Tibetan.

**SHUSTER**: He worked among the Chinese?

**CARLSON**: Yeah. Chinese...Chinese was his language, but not...not as far as I know Tibetan. But they...they where in the capital of the province, in Lanzhou, but not in other areas.

**SHUSTER**: Were there...what other Americans were there in Tibet besides missionaries?

**CARLSON**: In our area none. None whatsoever. In the...now, in capital of the province, you occasionally ran...ran across others. But where we where, no. An occasional explorer would come through, like Joseph Rock in the twenties. Members of [the team of] Sven [Anders] Hedin, the Swedish explorer, were there in the thirties. A couple of Americans, geologists, I guess, wandered through in the...oh, about 1940 or thereabouts. I have vague memories of them. But we were pretty well off the beaten track.

**SHUSTER**: You were not aware, for example, of any U.S. government presence at all?

**CARLSON**: No, none whatsoever.

**SHUSTER**: What about Tibetan music and art? What kind of instruments were common?

**CARLSON**: Tibetan music was almost non-existent. As far as I know they had no music as such.

**SHUSTER**: Not even singing a song?

**CARLSON**: No, they would have...they had stories which they would sort of chant, I guess, but no...no tunes, no popular songs, anything like that. The chanting in the lamasery halls was all a very monotonous thing. At the dances, it was just a rhythm, rhythmical drums that went pretty much [beats out rhythm on table]. That over and over again to the dances, and horns blowing, but no discernable tune. Art was all religious, painting of the gods and the demons. One form of art, which you ran across at New Years' time was making of images out of butter. Butter would be dyed into various bright colors, and then molded onto a wooden frame. But again, this was all...all religious. The gods and the demons, and the var...their various activities and the...the torments through which they would put people when the people were passing though hell. But no...no art in that area that I was aware of.

**SHUSTER**: Well, I think that...I think that wraps up the questions I had on Tibet. Did you have anything more that you would want to add [microphone bumped] that we haven't covered or that....?

**CARLSON**: I don't...I don't think so, except a caution that I am acquainted only with this one area, a limited area, [train passing in background] which is quite remote from the center of Tibet, Lhasa, and the customs and the culture could be quite different.

**SHUSTER**: So you don't....

**CARLSON**: So that what one says for this part of Tibet wouldn't necessarily hold for other areas.

**SHUSTER**: Well, thank you once again for this view into [the] Tibetan part of the world.

**CARLSON**: Okay. My pleasure.

**END OF TAPE**