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Name of Interviewer:	Mary Ndlovu (MN) and Zephaniah Nkomo (ZN)
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Name of translator:	
Name of transcriber:	Mary Ndlovu
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TRANSCRIPTION

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	This is an interview with Retired Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Ngwenya. It's conducted on behalf of Mafela Trust and South African History Archive by Mary Ndlovu and Zephaniah Nkomo and it's conducted on January 19 th , 2011
MN	Ngwenya, please, can you tell us a little bit about yourself first of all. How did you get to the struggle and what did you do there over the years?
TN	In short, when I left school, I joined the trade union, through Aaron Ndlovu. When NDP came I joined full time NDP Youth League. From there, went further up to ZAPU Youth League, right through until it was banned. Arms were coming in now, I remember the year, vital year, that was 1962. Arms were coming from Tanganyika through Northern Rhodesia, by Sikhwili Moyo and other people, right through to Bulawayo. They would not come by train up to Bulawayo but they would be off-loaded off Bulawayo - Dete, Hwange and then taken by cars to their rightful places which was Matopo Hills, where they were being kept. And in short, I was the main contact with Salisbury. Salisbury had one man who would contact me and I would deal with that man and he would not deal with anybody else. We

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	had Dumiso Dabengwa, Ethan Dube, they knew where the weapons were and if he comes with the vehicle I would spend the day with him during the day. In the evening I give them the vehicle at a spot and take the other one until such time then we go and get the vehicle, and then I open the boot and then I say "Here is your vehicle. Go" Until one time when he was arrested, when he changed the route, went through Beitbridge route, no ... Shabani route ..
MN	Who was this one arrested.
TN	Around Shabani [inaudible] Manyonga; he was avoiding the roadblocks, Gwelo. So this man I think he was squeezed a little bit. He did mention my name, even the house number, and it came through that he was arrested but quietly it didn't appear in the papers. One of the Sundays, when I had been arrested for that offence, then I .. we wrote in toilet paper to Ethan Dube for transmission to Leo Baron to fight for a bail for me because they feared lots of people would have their necks cut. So he did, Baron got the bail for me, guarantee was given by Ethan Dube for me. Only about two days when I was out, reporting daily from Mzilikazi Police Station, what happens... When I get there the African sergeant is looking for my file to sign that I've come to ... that I've reported. He couldn't find it, until a white boy came, he got the file he said "sign" and when I signed I had already seen from the headlines <i>Sunday News</i> . When I came from home ¹ I went to archives in Harare, and looked for that paper and I found it. When I got that one ...
ZN	What was written on this paper?
TN	All the weapons, machine guns, pistols, AKs, which shook the white community completely.
MN	Because they had been discovered?
TN	Those which were taken from the boot of [inaudible] Manyonga.
MN	And he's the one who named you.
TN	Yes because I was the main contact, he had nobody else to talk ... to go and see, even leaders who whichever ... no communication, so ... it appeared that morning when I had reported, quickly disappeared, I never went to my house ... I was staying at Makokoba. I spent the whole day, Luveve, near the railway station, waiting for the train now, because JZ had given me the OK to move out quickly. And JZ and Siwela, he's the former Mayor, who was the Treasurer
MN	Abel
TN	Abel. Then I was able to sneak out. I went into the train in the evening; I went into the top bed in the third class, up to the Falls. When we got to the Falls in the morning I could see across the Zambezi. When we got to Livingstone, I said "That's it, I'm free now". I went out, bought my loaf of bread, my syrup. Somebody was already waiting for me in Lusaka, Sikhwili and his ...

¹ I think he means when he came home after the war - 1980

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	And this was 1962, you said or 3?
TN	It was now ..
MN	By this time ...
TN	it was still 62. It was immediately after the the Christmas, just before the end of the year. So when I got there, we were accommodated at a place called Bwacha Hotel and for three days detectives came in. When they came in they said "You can't be in this hotel now you must have to go ... where? ... Ndola as if I'm going to the Congo
MN	By this time Zambia was not yet independent
TN	No, Zambia was having self-government at that moment. So the person who knew the area there better was Lookout Mhlanga. He accompanied me to the railway and right through the whole day until the train took off for Ndola. I went as if I was going to the Congo. I spent about two days there, and got into the bus again now going to where? ..Tanganyika. I think now it was 63 now, January, and there was a heavy rain. I had my little blanket in a paper bag, which separated because it got wet and then the next thing I was able ... I saw the inspector, the bus was leaving now for Kapiri Mposhi to Tunduma. Then I said, there's death I'm rushing for [inaudible] that's from Ndola with my wet blanket and I was wet for the whole night in that bus. Right, when we got to Kapiri Mposhi the bus turns northward toward ... to Tunduma, that is to Tanganyika. Then a policeman came into the bus, that was Northern Rhodesia police. There's a girl I knew from Hwange who was one of our strong members, but UNIP. She said "don't worry about that one" and then we went, until we got to ... the following day we got to Tunduma, which is the border with Northern Rhodesia; then went up to Mbeya, where we spent a few days before I went to Dar es Salaam when it was still Tanganyika. That year 1963 that's the year when I went for my military training in Ghana, with people like Sikhwili Moyo, Edward Bhebhe, Walter Mtimkulu, Munodawafa [inaudible] then Gamanya. I think we were six.
MN	Were you the first group for military training?
TN	No there were some who had already been sent to the eastern countries, but with us we were sent to the African country, when Nkrumah was still in power. Then we trained there, came back, we stayed in Tanganyika up to a point whereby we were ... there was an ... what was it, there was sort of like a boost for us, ZAPU ...ZANU was not by then, by that time. We were broadcasting Radio Tanganyika to to Rhodesia, telling everybody that you must come now for war... scolding Smith and so on. That was that. When ZANU split, then they closed that broadcast. Then with all the heydays there, not very good for us, always fighting ZANU, ZAPU but when ZANU openly said we have split, Nyerere gave us our offices back, said everything, even buildings properties, ZAPU - ZANU must find theirs, and then during that time I stayed a little bit, and then I came back to ... 64 to Northern Rhodesia, Zambia now. That's when I worked hand in hand with Dumiso Dabengwa, to the front, as early as 64 and then with different missions and so on. I was
ZN	What were some of those missions?

Speaker	Dialogue
TN	Well, like driving ... when you drive, you are assigned to do sort of intelligence collection, information. I worked very well with Dabengwa, one of those people I worked with, I never had a quarrel with, in my memory. We had, later we had people like Report Mphoko, Akim Ndlovu coming .. well that is in short with Dabengwa and so on ... up to a point when we started working with Umkhonto we Sizwe. We worked with Umkhonto we Sizwe with people like Modise, Joe Modise, Stewart - he's a coloured man, Masondo, Akim on our side, Roma Nyathi on our side .. I'm talking of those who were in the command. In the arms .. I used to be given special missions. That time when we had small vehicles, like landrovers, I used to carry either personnel to Dar es Salaam and come back with weapons. I remember one time being arrested for that.
MN	By the Zambians
TN	It was still predominantly whites in the police force, but there was no molesting and so on, no, but as soon as they knew that I was ZAPU then they released me. For a long time I worked along the Great North, we call it Great North Road, Lusaka – Dar es Salaam until we had big trucks where I used to go and carry weapons.
MN	Were you ever carrying them into Zimbabwe?
TN	That time now.. well when we were operating with Dabengwa we were going right to the front. But now from Lusaka to Dar es Salaam I was not getting to the front. I would only get to Zimbabwe House and then they would take their consignment and then I get my vehicle, get it ready for another trip back.
MN	OK and this went on through the late 60's, early 70's
TN	Yes, yes
ZN	And those early days, did you make any capture of weapons.
TN	That time no, not really as much .. only what I can remember we had some casualties like we had somebody who was regional commander in the north ... Sakupwanya who was killed. That time Cele had come to join us. We were now working with Cele and company and that time and so on, but later when now the war started really to take shape, that is especially after the Wankie battles and the Sipolilo, that's when we started capturing weapons and so on. Some of those would help us for the leadership when conducting a press conference. Like the weapons, take the G3 ...
MN	Let's look at the photographs now. What period do you think these come from? About what... these are all weapons that were captured. [3B-17-04]
TN	These come from the Rhodesian army
MN	But which years. What year do you think this could have been?
TN	When it comes to the years, I would be very much misleading you to mention that it was about this year, but it was during ... when the war was now
ZN	In the 1970's

Speaker	Dialogue
TN	Yes, definitely
MN	Well, most of these photographs were taken after 76 so it would be somewhere around there. But maybe you could identify some of these weapons here
TN	Here we have something like athese were the Rhodesian type of weapons.
MN	What are they ... these are rifles, automatic rifles G3?
TN	Yes and the other one which is pre - before the G3... because the G3 is like an AK 47 and AK M are two models, but all AKs. These are the Rhodesian type of weapons they were using. They never used the AKs
MN	Yes, they used the G3. Where were they manufactured, these weapons, where did they get them from?
TN	They would get them through South Africa.
MN	OK
TN	South Africa had a factory, an armoury
MN	Oh, they were manufactured in South Africa.
TN	Yes. It is even, when you get to these armoured ... the pumas that was the version from South Africa.
MN	OK Did they ..Were any of them manufactured in Rhodesia?
TN	No, no no I don't remember. I don't know about that one but that one I don't think we ever established that.
MN	That there was anything manufactured. And what else is here now, though ... this is ammunition
TN	That's the ammunition
MN	For these weapons
TN	Yes a mortar
MN	But let's finish with these ones...what are these small things here... and these.
TN	Oh, these are mines, yes no ..this is a detonator this is a pistol and that's uniforms. The uniforms we had a lot of them after especially the Wankie battle
MN	So they were captured with the weapons. You found them together. So where would these have been found together like this? What would be a situation where you would find a pile of uniforms, weapons rifles and mines all together
TN	No this is not you find them a pile like that. This is for our demonstration, that this is what we have captured.
MN	OK So they wouldn't be found together.
TN	Yes, one by one ... it means you know, our cadres would never, had never had a problem

Speaker	Dialogue
	with food, because they were getting the food from them
MN	So these would have....
TN	After the camp has been run.
MN	So they would overrun the camp
TN	Yes, or a company or a platoon, then you .. you capture the equipment.
MN	And did they use the weapons then.
TN	No we were not using ourselves.
MN	What did you do with them. You brought them back to Zambia
TN	Yes yes
MN	Would these have been captured in ... in Rhodesia or in Zambia?
TN	No in Zambia there were only Selous Scouts for reconnaissance to start with. We never had contingents coming for a real attack.
MN	OK so .. but would they then carry these back to Zambia
TN	Yes, when it's only two or three he carries, and then after crossing the river we take it by the car
MN	OK And then these, what are these here.
TN	These are mines
MN	Mines?
TN	Yes, to me this looks like anti-personnel.
MN	OK So these would have been captured from a camp somewhere
TN	Actually the mines too, when ... because we had the engineers ... when we suspect. Anti-personnel you don't dig it onto the ground, it is meant just for the person or you can dig it because the weight doesn't need so much weight.
MN	But they would be keeping these in their camp and then they would go out and plant them ... so I didn't quite understand ...they would bury them ...
TN	Actually what happens, the Rhodesians wherever they based for a long time, if it's a contingent like a platoon or company, they'd make sure there is enough security surrounding them.
MN	Oh, so they planted around their camps. Oh, OK and then, what is this [3B-16-10]
TN	That's a tripod at times it's like for putting a machine gun on top
MN	It's sort of like a tripod to hold the gun.
TN	Yes
MN	And what type of bullets are these?

Speaker	Dialogue
TN	These are for G3, which is like 303. These would not go into an AK
MN	So you couldn't make use of them once you get ...
TN	No,no; you don't use them ..
MN	So what would you do with them when you capture them .. you just brought them back to headquarters?
TN	No you use them at the camps maybe for killing animals and so on.
MN	Oh OK, alright. And then ...So they weren't wasted. And then this one ...what is that?[3B-15-01]
TN	That's a mortar.
MN	What is it used with?
TN	A mortar ...if somebody has a mission to destroy this building, he uses this ... this is the mortar.
MN	Ok and what's the difference between a mortar and a rocket
TN	A rocket you can go direct like that ...straight A mortar you you ..
MN	You calculate. You shoot up
TN	You calculate the distance, you calculate ... where you put your tripod you calculate just and say so many metres from me. It will go up. When it lands then it explodes. This house ... if there are three mortars landing onto this house it will be a ruin of ten years.
MN	So to shoot a mortar then you need more training then, more expertise than to shoot the rocket. Is that right? Cause the rocket you can shoot, you can see your target.
TN	Yes, well the mortars, people .. some specialize on that but, he is going to be an infantryman but he specializes. The same with a rocket.
MN	So so... how did the Rhodesians use these mortars, then. What did they use them for. If they were attacking guerrillas, what would they need this mortar for?
TN	For instance, if you go to the Zambezi .. the Rhodesians, there was one time when they would put fire whilst they are across the river. This you can fire from the other side of the river.
MN	Oh, they'd shoot it right across the river.
TN	Yes
MN	Oh ... and what would they be doing ... aiming it into your camps?
TN	Yes
MN	What would be the range of this ..
TN	I'm not really quite conversant, because I didn't specialize on this.

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	But then the rocket ... would be used how.
TN	The rocket you can go up to 500 meters effectively
MN	But you shoot it from your ...from your shoulder, is it?
TN	You can shoot it.. let's say here, from your, not shoulder, yes you carry it
MN	That bazooka or rocket launcher. So they used those
TN	Yes
MN	And when they were firing from the air to the ground, they used rockets, is it, and bombs.
TN	Yes, the bombs. You know, when you are not using an aircraft you can use this.
MN	Yes, the mortar o.k. This one, is an interesting photograph. [3B-17-22]
TN	This one looks to me it's like an exhaust of an aircraft.
MN	Yes, that's what we thought,.
TN	That is ...you see, the heat-seeking missile will easily bring down any aircraft that is throwing the exhaust behind, unlike the helicopter which disperses the hot gases. You cannot shoot it with
MN	OK The heat-seeking missile. So the ZPRA forces had those missiles
TN	We had plenty. At one time we thought the Russians had given us forty heat-seeking missiles, when we were trying to shoot the helicopters. Because the helicopter ... the exhaust is the other side and it dispersed, the hot gases dispersed.
MN	OK. This one also looks like the propeller of the helicopter, doesn't it. So these are from two different aircraft?
TN	If the heat-seeking can get that aircraft ... well whatever is within there is going to be destroyed completely
MN	So how do you think this one was shot down, since it's not destroyed?
TN	This must be anti-air
MN	Anti-aircraft ... guns rather than missiles?
TN	Yes anti-air gun
MN	I see, OK. So this would have been part of ... is this part of a helicopter then
TN	Not not a helicopter, must be an aircraft
MN	What kind of aircraft would that be, a spotter plane or one of those jets ..those Hawker
TN	Hawker yes
MN	So you did shoot down some of those.
TN	Yes, oh plenty

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	With the anti aircraft?
TN	Heat seeking and anti-air
MN	So those were the two ways you shot these ... these airplanes
TN	Because the anti ... the heat-seeking, unlike the anti-air, heat-seeking you only wait for the aircraft to approach, it gives you the signal that there's something coming. As soon as it's just on top, you fire, you don't even aim at it
MN	It just follows the plane by itself
TN	It's not a matter of following; as it leaves your barrel it has caught the aircraft. It will explode twice - "bah, bah" - and the aircraft will go down, fail to move now.
MN	So were .. do these planes that were shot down, was it in Zambia or in Zimbabwe?
TN	We shot plenty in Zambia, which had come in to Zambia, because inside the Rhodesia we only shot those Viscount
MN	OK you didn't shoot any other planes within...
TN	Those which were coming to attack us in Zambia, we shot them
MN	And how did the the men feel when they managed to shoot down a plane?
TN	Morale is very high. When you are in the bush, two things ... they were tough days when you never know whether the sun is going to rise, or set but when you get onto the enemy by the tail, you really jump.
MN	Was there any system by which those who shot down planes and so on could be rewarded or given any kind of recognition, or was it considered something done by the whole group.
TN	Definitely if, for instance, if ZAPU was in government, we'd have had a lot of them awarded those medals
MN	But there wasn't any system in ZPRA for rewarding.
TN	There's only one I can remember in ZPRA who got the medal ..I think it's called for outstanding performance ..Khumalo Madliwa yes ... he was commanding the battalion which was at Lisitu ... which was waiting to come in before the ceasefire. but it didn't come in because the ceasefire just overtook; and his area where he was with his troops, there was a bombardment for one week, whereby as statistics, militarily they were very minimal ..
MN	There were many...
TN	There would be maybe one person dead until when they were withdrawn, they were firing the B6, those are the big guns, 60 mm onto the mountains, it would shake; anybody who is around that area would move out of it. And then you have your way through
MN	You mean the ZPRA guys were shooting these guns?
TN	Yes

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MN	Across the river?
TN	No, not across, the Rhodesians were coming to bomb because we were waiting to get into Zimbabwe, to Rhodesia
MN	OK so they were waiting ... they were in Zambia
TN	They were waiting for orders to say, now is the time to cross.
MN	OK and the Rhodesians were trying to kill them on the ground
TN	Yes
MN	So these B6's it's an anti aircraft.
TN	No, it's an armour
MN	What were they doing with them then?
TN	They were meant, if we crossed, we were going to destroy the Rhodesian armoured cars.
MN	Oh I see, they were practicing.
TN	No not practicing
MN	What were they doing with them then?
TN	They were trained with them. You remember we had guerrillas and the regulars within ZPRA so those they were the regulars.
ZN	So in this case they were on the ready position
TN	Yes
MN	OK So they must have been trying to shoot these planes that were coming after them as well.
TN	Those planes which were coming to bomb during that time they were being shot; they went back, because they would come early in the morning, trying to surprise you, then they were [inaudible]
MN	OK. But some of them did get shot down in Zambia
TN	Not really. We didn't have so much contact with aircrafts right in Rhodesia
MN	But in Zambia
TN	Yes, in Zambia ... for instance .. take Angola, where they went to do the bombardment, they took them by surprise. Not very long before they bombarded that place, we went there with Munodawafa, to the camp and he addressed the troops there, then after he had done that then he just said, "No I came with one of your commanders here, maybe he has got something to say to you". I just told them that "Ah, with us at the front we are very safe, but with you behind here, you must be very very vigilant".
MN	Which camp was this?

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TN	Boma, in Angola.
MN	In Angola? Ah
TN	Yes That's the camp ...
MN	That was a training camp
TN	That's the camp which I'm one of those who went for the camp before it had intake.
MN	OK, so when these weapons were captured, then it seems they were displayed.
TN	Yes
MN	What was the purpose of this display of weapons? Maybe you could just describe what's going on here. This is in Lusaka I believe. [3B-14-07]
TN	It's like when you kill an animal, you skin it [inaudible] you must see the meat. That is what we were doing ... to give to the leader to show the whole world what we are doing and what is being done against us. We were not doing only against them, they were doing against us too.
MN	So so at this press conference, who would be attending? Who would be coming to see these weapons?
TN	Nkomo would invite all journalists, both BBC, Radio South Africa, but Rhodesians they would come on cover.
MN	But they must have known what you had found. They wanted to see what you had collected
TN	Yes. One of the press conferences I remember Nkomo asking..., he was holding a wing of a shot down aircraft, which is French, with the markings, and he said "Can you read here ... is this not from the western country?" So just to prove that what we are saying we are doing is what we have on the ground.
MN	So it was showing that those western countries were actually supporting Smith. On this ...this mortar here, does it say where it's coming from? [3B-15-01]
TN	This one, I'm not very sure, but it could be from ... because these weapons, when they manufacture them, they are always copying from one another, both the east, and the west.
MN	So you can't always be sure
TN	Maybe you have an explanation.
MN	When they ...when they had a press conference like this would they allow then the journalists to come and examine the weapons?
TN	They would be there to see for themselves, not to be told.
ZN	Probably tell us more about the showing of such weapons. We look at this one, this mortar, there were quite a number of forces that were part of the Rhodesian forces - South Africa, the Israelis were also in this .. were they also allowed to ...could they also be

Speaker	Dialogue
	allowed to come and view these presentations
TN	As I said, the press conference would be open.
MN	I suppose the diplomats would also come.
TN	Yes, by the way, the diplomats as you know, there were times when even if you captured a diplomat having gone into your area, you were not supposed to tamper with them.
MN	You mean a diplomat what ... going to try to see your camps?
TN	Yes
MN	Did they do that? Oh ...
TN	Yes. I remember I once caught one. Jakwenda, you know the area Jakwenda, that's a sort of like National Parks in that area
MN	Where, near Livingstone, in that area?
TN	No, eastern, eastern ... Lwangwa, Lwangwa. So one afternoon we were in the camp, then I heard a noise, sound of a vehicle, then I said "something wrong", and it disappeared, that noise disappeared. And then I took some men with me. We went to the road leading to the river. We couldn't see the tyre marks. That was a military attaché and he knew how to move on a road like that with his vehicle. So instead of moving where normally vehicles moved with their tyres, these tyres would be on the grass and grass on the other side, so there's no mark. .. so we laid an ambush until they came back.
MN	And you caught them. And they were from where?
TN	British
MN	British. And what happened when you caught them?
TN	We sent a message to Lusaka and when our office communicated with the Foreign Affairs in Lusaka we were .. our officer was told they got clearance to go into the area. They wanted to just go on an excursion. So I was told "don't interfere with them"
MN	So you released them
TN	Yes. It's the same with Khezwana ... whether you read about it ...you know Khezwana, we were together going to the Zambezi .. we met Selous Scouts. And Khezwana said to me, "let's just shoot them there and then" no, and I said, "No, don't .. let's no shoot them. Remain in the car keep your position, I'll go and speak to them" They said "No we're hunters" then I said to Khezwana "these people say they are hunters so they've got some meat" and they gave us some meat, we let them go . Those were Selous Scouts, you see.
MN	OK I think, anything else we want to say about capturing of weapons or have we covered what there is to say.
TN	When you capture weapons you have overcome over the enemy. When the enemy's now under pressure, you choose between your luggage and your life.

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	So what are you saying, some of them you left behind.
TN	They would leave their belongings. For your own information the Wankie battles, you know there was John Dube from ZAPU, ZAPU cadres, it was not ZPRA that time ² . Then there was Chris Hani from Umkhonto we Sizwe ... when they were captured in Botswana now, when they retreated now, after they exhausted themselves, they came with wonderful wrist watches.
MN	Oh, so it wasn't only weapons that were captured.
TN	The Botswanas you see, once you entered, they would detain you and say "We have detained them", but finally they would release them to us in Lusaka. People like Chris Hani, John Dube, when they came back to Lusaka, they were given a big reception at Peter McKay's residence, whether you have heard of him, he has been our very supporting member but now I understand now he's around Marondera.
MN	OK I think we can conclude then. Thank you very much.



² ZPRA was only created after the split with Chikerema and Nyandoro in 1970. Before that it was known as the military wing of ZAPU, or Special Affairs.