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Name of interviewee/s:	Ellingworth Poli (EP)
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TRANSCRIPTION

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	This is an interview with Ellingworth Poli, who has agreed to be interviewed as part of the Zenzo Nkobi Photographic Archive Project, being conducted by Mary Ndlovu and Zephaniah Nkomo on behalf of SAHA and Mafela Trust. This interview is being conducted on November 14 th at Bulawayo.
MN	Ellingworth, can you tell us a little bit first about yourself. How you came to be in the struggle in Zambia and what you were doing when you were there?
EP	Yah, it was a very good experience. I was very young by then, fifteen years old, and I was assisted by the guerrillas to get to Botswana. And then we had to go to Zambia. Maybe to say a little about the journey... It was very late in the afternoon, around five, and we were asked to go and seeing the other children outside home, I also got interested into going there. And we footed to Mazanyama, one of the very big river across to Botswana where we were taken into a camp with the rest of the people there.
MN	Which part of Zimbabwe were you coming from?
EP	I was coming from Tsholotsho.
MN	Tsholotsho. And you volunteered to join or you were ...



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EP	I did, because most of the people were eager to go and ..to the struggle. They were eager to go to the struggle. So I was part of them.
MN	OK, so when you were taken to Zambia, what made them take you to Victory Camp?
EP	Well they, they they ... all the girls were put there, they stayed there. So from our camp, that`s when people were taken to other camps for training, but everyone was taken to Victory Camp first, before they were taken to some other camps.
MN	O.K. And ...but you remained at Victory Camp?
EP	Yes, I did.
MN	Why? Why did they leave you there?
EP	By that time we .. we had a choice. You were allowed to choose what to do, and as someone who was already doing secondary level at home I was eager to continue with my education, so I chose to remain in the camp where there was a school.
MN	O.K. So you stayed there in order to get schooling?
EP	Yes
MN	What Form were you doing?
EP	I was doing Form 2
MN	I see, O.K. And... and while you were at Victory Camp how far did you go with your education.
EP	Up to O Level
MN	And you wrote your O Level?
EP	We wrote when we were this side.
MN	When you came back. Allright. But today we want to talk mainly about what happened at Victory Camp and what it was like to live there. First of all this photograph [1A – 42 – 15] seems to assemble a large number of children, and a lot of them are quite small. How was it that ... you were fifteen you were not big but you were big enough to walk and so on : but a lot of them seem to be much younger than that. How did that happen there were so many young children there?
EP	Yes, they were there, you see during struggle people moved from Rhodesia by then to to the struggle and sometimes there were some women with babies at their backs, so they had to cross with them and when they got there, they were young and sometimes there were some who were pregnant by then ... so when they crossed the country they had to give birth and so on and so on, so that`s why there were so many kids here.
MN	But some of them are like age five, six, eight, did they go with their mothers or they went with their older brothers and sisters ... how did they go?
EP	Mainly they went with parents, some of course with the sisters, depending on the situation when they were asked to go there.



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	So they were asked to go by the guerrillas?
EP	Yes, some of them. Some of them did it on their own. They crossed the river on their own.
MN	But why would they go with small children or pregnant?
EP	Sometimes it's because of the war. There was war at home and some of the the ... the homes were burnt and people had to run away being the whole family, so they were going there as refugees to hide
MN	OK,OK
EP	So the whole family had to go there.
MN	But they didn't remain in Botswana. Everybody was taken to Zambia
EP	Some of them ... those who went late remained there but those who went to war early they were all taken to Zambia.
MN	Why were they taken to Zambia?
EP	Maybe for training in different disciplines, as I said, yes.
MN	Was it dangerous to stay in Botswana?
EP	It wasn't, but I think the place was small and the aim really was for us to go to Zambia for training so everyone had to go there.
MN	What would these people have been gathered there for there in this photograph? [
EP	There were many events which took place in the camp, and some announcements were to be given to the kids, inspection, concerning health and so on, so each time there was an occasion to take place people were gathered together, and they were told what next.
MN	O.K. so this was a common occurrence, and do you have any idea how many children and girls there were in this camp?
EP	If I can guess, maybe, maybe a thousand, two thousand, thereabout, if I can guess
MN	And these buildings here ... are these offices or are they classrooms?
EP	These were dormitories, that's where we slept, yes. Very nice dormitories with some double beds, double decker ...
MN	Oh, the bunk beds
EP	The bunk beds, yes
MN	So how many would be there then in one dormitory?
EP	I'm not quite sure, but I think... twelve this side, maybe another twelve ... about twenty-four



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	So typical of a boarding school then
EP	Yes it was sort of, a very nice place.
MN	But then we also have this photograph showing tents. [4A – 13 – 36]
EP	Yes. To start with there were no dormitories but the dormitories were built later on. But when we arrived in the camp we were using tents
MN	I see. What year was that, that you arrived?
EP	'77, 1977.
MN	So the dormitories came a bit later.
EP	A bit later, yes
MN	OK. Who provided the funds, do you know, for building?
EP	I should think it's United Nations, yes, and some donors from all over the world.
MN	There's a photograph here of a visitor who you may not know yourself, but he's from the Commonwealth Secretariat – Ramphal. Did you often have people coming to visit like that? [2A – 10 – 14]
EP	Yes, there were a lot of people coming in there, and sometimes we were called to come and see them, greet them, sometimes they would have asked to see us, because they were told we were dying there, we were having some diseases, so they wanted to ... to have a look and experience it themselves, so they were called so that they could see us.
MN	So they didn't find you dying?
EP	No no, as you can see most of the pupils were very smart. The Old Man always emphasised that the children should be kept healthy and smart so ...
MN	When you say the Old Man ..
EP	I mean Mr Nkomo, Comrade Nkomo, Joshua Nkomo
MN	And how did you feel when you saw him coming with foreign visitors?
EP	Ahhh we were so happy, in fact we had heard about him some time back, so seeing him was something very nice to us as young people, so we would shout, sing some songs for him, we really liked him.
MN	Ok and this building here, is this a dormitory?
EP	It is
MN	O.K. So that's what the dormitories looked like. So he was coming to see that you weren't ... weren't lying on the ground. And then this photograph shows... can you tell us what's going on here? [2A – 71 – 15]
EP	Ahh This is the kitchen; that's where maybe our life based on. We had food here, there are some old women as we can see and some old men who had volunteered to come and cook for us, and a lot was cooked in this kitchen. I remember some kind of fish, tinned fish that we had, that was the the the most delicious one that we had.
MN	Do you know where it came from?
EP	I think from Botswana and Russia, somewhere there. That's what we heard anyway. Yes. We had also some big salted fish. Sometimes we had some green mealies from the local farmers, yes ... the farmers in Lusaka; we had a lot to eat really we had the three meals, usually meals that people had. We had them.
MN	You always had some relish to go with the sadza?
EP	Yes
MN	You didn't feel hungry?



Speaker	Dialogue
EP	No, no, we were given food
MN	And what did you do then in your spare time when you were there? You were there for a long time.
EP	Yes. We had a lot to do during our spare time. Sometimes we were provided with music by the different bands, and some dances.
MN	There's a photograph here - this one [2A -61 -28]
EP	Yes, some people came to entertain us from the other camps, we had the Workers Camp where the workers lived because they came in to work at the camp then they went back, so there were such groups. They entertained us. Sometimes we had this band. And we also entertained ourselves also; we liked singing.
MN	So the men didn't.. there were no men staying at the camp?
EP	No, except of course the few, the teachers and some other educators.
MN	Some of the teachers were men.
EP	Yes, some of them were men.
ZN	Any misbehaviours?
EP	By the kids? Yes there was sometimes; you know as kids it's obvious... you would find them misbehaving. There were some who misbehaved and they had to sneak out of the camp and when they...
ZN	In what way
EP	Most of them wanted to go out... you know it's boring staying in one place so they wanted to go out into Lusaka, yes and have fun there and then come back.
ZN	What kind of fun were they looking for?
EP	Well, I ... I can say they wanted, maybe just to go round, see the town, maybe buy some little things. Some of them had relatives in town who gave them some money .. so they wanted to go and spend the money there, so they would sneak out
MN	We found some photographs of girls with very small babies and we didn't think these babies... they carried with them from home. Was this some of the fun? [1G - 09 – 13]
EP	Yes, maybe that was some of the fun. Maybe sometimes some misbehaving with the instructors or the males in the camp. It could happen so....
ZN	What form of punishment would they get?
EP	Some punishment was given to such people. You would think maybe others would learn from those, but as you know sometimes kids are like that, they would continue to do it.
MN	So ... so were they punished when they were found to be pregnant or when they went out?
EP	Yes they were
MN	If they were found to be pregnant they were punished?
EP	No, sometimes if they were caught going out but if they were already pregnant, they were respected for that pregnancy, or else if they miscarried the people punishing them would get in trouble for that, so they did it when the girls were caught.
MN	What punishment?
EP	Some exercises were given. Sometimes they were asked to dig pits. Sometimes they were beaten.
ZN	What was the interaction like with the elderly women in the camp?
EP	We were asked to respect them. For example, there was an old lady who was with us, Gogo Nyamurowa. She had a tent in the centre of the camp and we were urged to respect



Speaker	Dialogue
	her as an elderly lady there. And even the other old ladies we had to respect them, because if they reported us that we were misbehaving we could be punished, so we really respected them.
MN	So they were the disciplinarians.
EP	Yes
MN	But who were the people who supervised the whole camp?
EP	There was a camp commander, Sibanda, Cecilia yes, Cecilia Sibanda and commissar also... he was Isaac Sibanda... and a lot of instructors.
MN	Instructors, you mean teachers or military instructors?
EP	There were military instructors plus teachers. So when we were going for exercises, the military instructors took over, but when we were at school the teachers were doing this
ZN	Did you find Gogo Nyamurowa resourceful in terms of looking into the the cultural aspects and other...
EP	Yes she was, she sometimes acted like a counsellor to the bigger girls, especially these, if they go out, they will be punished, then thereafter they will be taken to her to give counselling to them
MN	And if they were pregnant, were they also given counselling on how to handle the pregnancy and the baby?
EP	Yes, there also was a a clinic in the camp; yes, they went there for counselling, for treatment and even for ... yes for treatment.
ZN	Tell us about the security arrangement in that camp
EP	With that one we were given it by the instructors... we had to be very alert. Yes, we had to be very alert; some instructions were given such that if we hear them we should do something to..
MN	Hear what?
EP	Maybe some commands, some whistles and so on. So if you hear such kind of a gong, such kind of a whistle, what should you do.
MN	That would be implying there was going to be an attack?
EP	Yes if ever there could be
ZN	They were codes, sort of codes
EP	Yes, they were codes
MN	This photograph here [4A – 93- 01] - it looks like people are relaxed, but maybe you could just describe what's ... what's happening there.
EP	Yes, we had some pits. Each person had to make her pit, whereby if ever there was an enemy we could go in and hide.
MN	So you dug these yourselves.
EP	Yes, we did it ourselves.
MN	And then you had to stay close.
EP	Yes, we had to stay close, so we had to create some friendship around the pits, so our neighbours, you had to know who your neighbour was because we somehow related to each other, yes. And you would find that it was very cool in the pit. So if you wanted to rest, you went in there and rested ... it was cool.
MN	So only one person can go in this pit, because it looks quite big,
EP	Yes, only one person. Yes it was big because we could even keep our possessions in there.



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	Oh you kept some things there.
EP	Yes, there was some things there
MN	In case you had to stay for a while.
EP	Yes
MN	There wasn't any problem of people stealing other people's things?
EP	Of course, stealing is there, stealing is there, but no it wasn't an issue
MN	So were you allocated a place, they would say for a whole dormitory "all those in this dormitory you dig your pits in this area"?
EP	No. We did it voluntarily
MN	You just were told to dig. So you'd go with your friends and say "you put yours there, I put mine there"?
ZN	Was it easy to identify these pits when they were so many and you were so many
EP	Ah, No you could identify, maybe with the kind of cover that you put. This cover was put such that it protected us from the falling soil into the pits so we had to cover this one.
MN	OK What is this thing made of?
EP	It's plastic
MN	It's plastic and what kind of soil... what do you mean?
EP	The soil on the ground
ZN	The soil has been dug; the soil has been removed from the pit, it was around
EP	Yes, it was around, so maybe if someone was moving around, could force the soil into the pit... so to protect that we had to put this one
MN	I see, so if you.. if there was an attack coming and you went into the hole like this, or the pit, what would you be protected from? [4A - 93-05]
EP	Maybe from the person seeing you.
MN	Which people?
EP	The enemy of course, from Rhodesia.
MN	But would this protect you from a ground attack or an air attack?
EP	Especially from an air attack, because they couldn't see from high up.
MN	Ok So they wouldn't know where you were
EP	Yes, they would think maybe these were just plastics lying around, yet there were people underneath.
MN	Ok But then if a bomb hit directly it's not going to help you
EP	No, of course
MN	So it wasn't going to protect you from ... It was a camouflage more than a real protection.
EP	Yes, it was a camouflage
MN	I see. I see. And did you feel safe with these?
EP	We were really, yes
MN	It made you feel like you were protected. Did you ever experience any ...
EP	... yes, especially from things like napalm; you know when they throw the napalm on us, we could be safe, because the pit was such that you dig downwards and then to sideways, such that this one is just an entrance, we would be behind there.
MN	Would they join up or each one would be separate? They didn't join the other pits?
EP	No, no, you had your own
MN	But did you ever experience an attack?



Speaker	Dialogue
EP	No, at our camp there was no attack. Even though some planes, I remember one day they passed by .. they almost...but then no
MN	What type of planes... did you see them or you just heard?
EP	Yes, we did
MN	Were they helicopters? What kind of planes?
EP	Yes, they were helicopters
ZN	So the whole life in the camp was an experience of staying in alertness?
EP	Yes, we had to be alert all the time especially after they had shown up
ZN	Then when did this get eased up?
EP	Ah , as time went by we relaxed. As kids, sometimes we easily forget, so we relaxed.
MN	But you must have been 18 by the time you left.
EP	I left when I was about fifteen.
MN	You left when you were fifteen?
EP	Yes, I was there ...
MN	Oh, you left home at fifteen ...so by the time you left Victory Camp you must have been about 18
EP	Yes, thereabout.
MN	There's one other photograph here. [2A-04- 23] Do you recognize this? Tell us about it.
EP	There were some old women from Workers Camp. These were skilled women who could make clothes. There was a big hall called big Bawa ¹ . That's where these were placed so they could come from Workers Camp to work then they were taken back to the camp in the afternoon.
MN	So what were they doing here?
EP	They made some clothes, some shirts, even some combats for the soldiers, even our clothes as kids. They made them.
MN	Allright. Do you know where the machines came from, the sewing machines?
EP	It was a donation but I'm not sure, as I was young I'm not sure where the donation was from.
MN	You weren't worrying about those things?
EP	Not much
MN	Were there also other kinds of clothing being donated, ready- made clothing?
EP	Yes, there were, and during the ... the assemblies sometimes we were called to come and get them [inaudible]
MN	Now we wanted to ask you what kind of memories you have of that experience. What was good about it, what was bad about it?
EP	By now, if I think of that time I feel I wish I could go back, at least have a bit of experience of that again. It was sometimes lovely... many friends, classmates, I remember with me of course it was even very good because I was chosen there as someone responsible for our logistics for the clothes. We were doing Home Economics, we were sewing as kids at school, so I was responsible for that, I liked it, giving other people some things there, I liked it. We also, we also had some entertainment in the camp. As biggest..we were almost the biggest girls in the camp, we were Form Fours when we left the place so we had some

¹ Taken from the name of a popular beerhall in Bulawayo.



Speaker	Dialogue
	responsibility of looking after the other young children. It was interesting, it was really interesting, but of course we were living under fear, that's another disadvantage; we could be killed at any time, so despite being happy if any airplane zoomed around, we felt we had to run to our pits. It wasn't ...sometimes we were punished, sometimes for something suspected to have done when we really did not do it and we'd get heavy punishment so... and I also missed my parents. I remember one day when they sent a parcel and I had to go and collect it in Lusaka, so I really longed for my parents... so I felt one day I have to go back to my home and see my parents and my brother. So that was the experience.
MN	But, but the administration of the camp, was it fair? You said they sometimes punished you for things you didn't do.
EP	Yes, it was fair, because if you live as a group and such measures are not taken, obviously things will go wrong, so discipline has to be maintained all the time. Of course they were fair. The ... the people who looked after us were heads of schools, they had a know-how of how to care for a child. Yes. It was o.k. Even with instructors they knew if they overdo it, Comrade Nkomo will be after them, so they made sure they had the correct measure of control ...
MN	So you knew that Omdala [the old man ref. Joshua Nkomo] was going to protect you.
EP	Yes, yes
ZN	You are a proud lady as a product of the struggle.
EP	I am, yes, I am. I feel I'm happy I was part of it
MN	Were there others who had a less positive experience, any who sort of like ran away from the camp or disappeared?
EP	Yes, some ran away from the camp, but mainly it was because they wanted maybe to visit their relatives but it was not allowed so they wanted to go there, visit. Sometimes just to go round the town, as kids you know, just to see those things, how the Zambians behaved, because they behaved in a manner we were not used to, the way they dressed, the way they talked, you know, so people were eager to see
MN	So it was curiosity.
EP	Yes, but there were some Ndebele people also in Lusaka who were based there, yes, who had farms around Lusaka, so they could sometimes come to the camp, look for the children from the areas where they came from themselves, so that gave curiosity to the children, to go into Lusaka and have...
MN	And then when they came back they'd be punished. Or some wouldn't come back I suppose
EP	Yes. Very few could not come back. But usually they liked the place, they wanted to go there but come back. They liked the place.
MN	Is there anything else you want to tell us about Victory Camp?
EP	Yes, the thing maybe I would like to outline to the world at large...maybe ...maybe to the people in Zimbabwe is to value this country because the young children suffered for it. Though they were at school but their minds were focussed in having a good Zimbabwe, so I wish our elders would take note of that, so that maybe they do good for the sake of these children who went outside the country to fight for... to liberate the country.
MN	One last question. If you had finished your O Level at Victory Camp, would you have then gone for training, for military training?



Speaker	Dialogue
EP	No, if you were in the education sector they would maybe give further training in education rather than the military.
MN	So you had chosen that.
EP	Yes, I had chosen that.
MN	Let me just conclude again.
EP	Maybe, to conclude again as I have said, I'm happy I was part of the struggle, even though I was under education, because the country is not all about war only, but education is also part of the country.
ZN	So you went to war, and you came back.
EP	I came back, yes
ZN	What did you find?
EP	The first people I met were my parents, they came to collect me from Luveve, and I was so happy, the country was going to be ruled by our own people.
ZN	How did they know you were coming?
EP	I think it was announced; it was announced here in the country because we found the parents there. And we used the train to come back. It was lovely, in the train we were given new things, new plates, new clothes, and we really enjoyed, as children.
MN	And then when you came... when you came you went back to school here, to finish your O Levels
EP	Yes, I went to Fatima
MN	Oh you went to Fatima
EP	Yes, that's where I finished.
MN	Right. And you had some of the same teachers there that you came with from Victory Camp
EP	Yes, we had the same teachers and some additional of course, from the country.
MN	And you found ..how ... did you find the schooling you had there at Victory Camp was good enough to continue now and complete
EP	Almost, because the same teachers were there and we were using the same syllabus so I think ...
MN	The few teachers that you can still remember ..
EP	We had Mr Mabi, we had Mr Matutu, we had Mr ... Mrs Matutu andthe Matutus were three. We had Mr ... he's now teaching at Hope Foundation Secondary. He's Mr. ...I can't remember, but there was a lot of them.
MN	And now you're a teacher, now you are a headmistress yourself.
EP	I am a headmistress, yes
	End of Interview.