

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CLAUDE WILLIAMS
Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Army, World War II
1997

OH
459

Williams, Claude, (1921-). Oral History Interview, 1997.
User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Williams, born and raised in Virginia, describes his experiences during basic training and his Army service in Burma, India and China with the 464th Anti-Aircraft Battery before returning to the United States. He volunteered for the Army primarily to get away from the Depression. After signing his own induction papers at Cape Lee (Virginia), Williams attended basic training at Fort Eustis (affectionately referred to as "Useless"), he mentions some lingering Civil War animosity among the soldiers, which he characterizes as "ribbing". Williams speaks of specific coastal artillery training at Fort Fisher (North Carolina) and why it was difficult to get pilots to pull the target they used for anti-aircraft training. After departing from Camp Kilmer (New York), Williams spent 40 days manning the guns aboard the British ship *Mauritania* before reaching Bombay, India. He describes the vehicle shortage in India and waiting two months for their "artillery" pieces to arrive in Calcutta before proceeding to Assam, India to guard the Ledo Road (supply route to China). In that position for eighteen months, Williams speaks of daily life, that a USO show never made it to their location, and never getting shot at until their unit was repositioned to Pasham, China to guard a bridge Merrill's Marauders had captured. Williams describes the three distinct attempts 35 to 40 Japanese airplanes (Mitsubishi) made to destroy the bridge and their position high on the mountainside adjacent to the Salween River and their surprise when the Japanese flew under their position in the valley. Williams talks about morale being low while in the jungles because 40 percent of the men were sick with malaria, dengues fever, or dysentery. He describes his own experience while sick with malaria, the effects of the disease, and the medicine. Using stolen batteries (from rail yards or bulldozers) to operate a radio, Williams listened to Tokyo Rose or Axis Sally most of the time because of BBC's poor reception quality. Williams recounts the ordeal and experiences trying to get a ride back to the United States, which included multiple trips between Myitkyina (Burma), India, and Shanghai, and destroying supplies and airplanes on an airfield before he was allowed to depart. Williams touches upon his homecoming celebration of drinking and having a good time for a couple of years. The interview concludes with Williams talking about meeting his wife in Ohio and the reasons for moving to Neenah (Wisconsin) where he worked at the paper mills, using the G.I. Bill to pay for a correspondence course, and reasons for not joining the VFW.

Biographical Sketch

Williams (1921-) served with the 464 Anti-Aircraft Battery during World War II in the China-Burma-India Theater guarding the Ledo Road before being discharged in 1945.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997
Transcribed by Mike Chusid, 2005.
Transcription edited by John McNally, 2006

- Mark: Today's date is the 13th of June, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Claude Williams, originally from Clintonville, Wisconsin –
- Williams: You know, I'm not originally from Clintonville – that's where my address is now.
- Mark: Oh, Clintonville, okay. Presently at Clintonville, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War. Good morning, and thanks for coming in.
- Williams: Thank you.
- Mark: I appreciate it. Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?
- Williams: Well, I was born and raised in Virginia. And on Pearl Harbor day I was working in a machine shop down in Virginia. On water contract jobs. That was only a brief period of time.
- Mark: Now you were about twenty years old?
- Williams: Nineteen years old.
- Mark: So I presume you remember something of the depression?
- Williams: [Laughs.] Oh, you bet. Yeah, I did. Poor dirt farmers and coal miners from Virginia, and some of my relations they were busy growing tobacco until Roosevelt came by, and Roosevelt cut down about a hundred acres. They used to work in the mines and raise corn, well, corn and tobacco. Everybody knew then that tobacco was bad, and so was the coal mines [laughs], so that's one reason why I came to Wisconsin. And get out of the heat!
- Mark: Now you got a defense job, as I think you mentioned.
- Williams: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark: Once American rearmament started about 1940 or so, did the economy – from what you can tell – sort of pick up?
- Williams: Yes, yes, it did. More people had jobs. Before that, you could see them sitting around all over – on the curbs and wherever they could sit down.
- Mark: So you joined the military pretty soon after Pearl Harbor?
- Williams: Yeah.
- Mark: You volunteered?
- Williams: Yeah, I volunteered, yeah.
- Mark: For what reason? Now was it patriotism –

- Williams: Patriotism was one thing. And getting the hell away from that depression. The depression was still on, you know. But it was the better part of the depression.
- Mark: So why don't you just walk me through your induction into the military? You had to the recruiter, I assume, sign some papers, and then go off to boot camp. Why don't you just tell – why don't you just walk me through your experience entering the military?
- Williams: I personally had the application forms, and I tried telling the person to sign it, and I couldn't get them to sign it, so I signed it myself.
- Mark: Now at this time you had to be twenty-one?
- Williams: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark: They eventually lowered that.
- Williams: Yeah, some dumb thing like that. Yeah, Cape Lee, Virginia – that's where I was inducted. From there we went down to Fort Eustis, Virginia, for basic training. We called it Fort Useless –
- Mark: Fort Useless?
- Williams: Yeah. Because it was Fort Useless. Took basic training there. Took that, and then went down to North Carolina, Carolina beach, Cape Davis, North Carolina at Fort Fisher, North Carolina. And we were there for two months, and the next thing was at King Caber, New Jersey. Went to New York and got on the boat.
- Mark: Now you initially went into coastal artillery?
- Williams: [Laughs.] Yes, coastal artillery. Well, that's when things were getting transferred over from – They scrapped the coastal artillery, because there were no ships out there to shoot at.
- Mark: Right.
- Williams: So they added anti-aircraft on to it. So it was all anti-aircraft.
- Mark: So you were initially trained in coastal artillery, but they phased that out quickly afterwards?
- Williams: That was phased out. But you still had the same title: coastal artillery, that was phased out. And we were in anti-aircraft. With 40 millimeters and 50 caliber machine guns.
- Mark: Now I want to talk a little bit about boot camp. As a -- Fort Lee or Fort Eustis – I can't remember?
- Williams: Boot camp was Fort Eustis. Fort Lee was an induction center.

Mark: As I remember boot camp from about forty years after, it brought people together from all parts of the country and that sort of thing. Was that your experience, or was it pretty regional?

Williams: You're right. You know, it did. You got to know people.

Mark: How'd that go?

Williams: I think it worked out good.

Mark: No regional tensions, or that sort of thing? Well, I think, for example, of a Virginian still fighting the Civil War.

Williams: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: Did that sort of thing go on?

Williams: Sure, still goes on. [Laughs.] But in my family, the relations were fighting on both sides in Virginia.

Mark: You were up in the north more. It was all just joking, I presume? It was just in fun.

Williams: Yeah, the ribbing. But in the same family, they had – some in the same family fought on both sides. I know in one place near where I lived there was a Yankee hospital. The people round Virginia – they stayed away from it. That place was empty down there when I was a kid. Slave quarters and everything was just sitting out there. And people wouldn't even go near it. 'Cause it was a Yankee hospital.

Mark: Um, and so were you selected to go into the coastal artillery? Was it something that you chose?

Williams: Took a famous IQ test that they gave you. [Laughs.] That IQ test that we took, the guy says, "Okay. Anybody that's got any booze or anything with them – get rid of it." So we had a big party. The next day they give us the IQ test. I didn't make out too good. [Laughs.] So whatever it was – however the army does it, or the service did it, some of the guys went into the medical corps, some went into infantry, and some went into coastal artillery and the field artillery.

Mark: And so what sort of training did you do with the guns? I mean, I assume that after boot camp, you went to these various other camps and learned how to shoot.

Williams: We went down – well, at boot camp we had a guy out there with a Sesman 180, Pole-nothing, a boot-bandit, and we were shooting at that. But they discontinued that, because too many of the planes were being shot down instead of the target. You couldn't get a guy with enough nerve to pull the damn target. [Laughs.] So they got some remote planes up for us to shoot at. And we did good. We really were the best in the camp. Actually that – They stuck us on the boat for overseas.

Mark: You left from Camp Kilmer for where?

Williams: New York. Long Island.

Mark: Did you go overseas eventually?

Williams: That's where we go. Camp Kilmer is a P of E [point of embarkation].

Mark: Right.

Williams: We only had a few days and we got on the boat for India.

Mark: To India? Oh, that's what I'm wondering. Why don't you just describe your voyage over there to me? How long did it take?

Williams: Forty days.

Mark: That's a long time.

Williams: We were on the British ship Martini.

Mark: Um-huh.

Williams: And it was an all-British crew, British captain and everything. And there were a group of us – we manned the guns on the ship, that's all we did – and sailed to Bombay, India. When we got to Bombay, we got on two smaller boats and take them to – Bombay. From Colombo [Sri Lanka] to Bombay. Then we had a nine-day train drive, ride to Calcutta. We get in Calcutta – we don't have any vehicles or nothing. So we had to borrow some or buy some – some were 1930 vintage trucks or cars. It was the same thing when we got in China – we didn't have any vehicles. The Chinese army pulled our artillery pieces down to the Salween River. We didn't have anything to pull them on. Every time we wanted to go anywhere we had to get on a Chinese truck.

Mark: I assume India was a very different place than Virginia where you grew up.

Williams: Yeah, a little hotter there, and they drink a lot of tea there. Tea and a lot bigger mosquitoes. And the monsoon season was half of every year. You'd have three months and it would dry out and you couldn't even get a drink of water.

Mark: So you eventually got to Calcutta and then went inland somewhere?

Williams: We sat in Calcutta for two months, waiting for our artillery pieces to come in, and they came by the Pacific up the Bay of Bengal, and they didn't run American troop ships that way, because they've been harassed by the Japanese, flying out of Burma. A lot of American sailors lost their lives, coming into Calcutta that way.

Mark: And once you got your guns then, what did you do?

Williams: We went in Assam, India. It's up on the Burma border.

Mark: Right.

Williams: And our object was to guard the Ledo Road that connects us with the Burma Road.

Mark: Which brought supplies into China.

Williams: Yeah. And that brings up this one reason why they brought up this artillery piece [?] from anti-aircraft field, that we fired in China. We didn't see any action til we got to China. We sat out there in India about eighteen months on a bridge and a railroad yard.

Mark: And so during this period what was your daily routine?

Williams: Sit there and wait for a plane to come over until you shoot at him.

Mark: But it never happened?

Williams: It never happened. Nope. About eighteen months there, sitting there sweating out the monsoons. And the monsoons – they was nothing flying anyway.

Mark: Did you at least see a USO show or something like that – did Bob Hope come? You're out in the boondocks doing nothing.

Williams: [Laughs.] They won't be having any Americans over there, see? Yeah, we had a couple of people come over there, but I never seen 'em, 'cause they were sitting back there where they had a road to. They didn't go where there weren't a road. Well, where we was there was a road, but I never seen any of them. We had Joey Brown, and this other woman came along – I never saw them.

Mark: So at this time were you itching to get into it, or did you just want to go out –

Williams: Yeah, yeah. Sit'n up in them hills and have'n a feast [?].

Mark: But you eventually did move on somewhere else?

Williams: Yeah, we did. When Merrill's Marauders came in, they came in and they were fighting a little to the east of us.

Mark: In Burma?

Williams: In Burma, yeah. We came back and caught a plane and flew to China. And part of our outfit went into Myitkyina (pronounced Mishina), and Merrill's Marauders took it, took care of the bridges on the road. That's what I was doing in China. When I first went to China, we set up our guns on the airfield, and then we turned that over to another unit in our outfit, and we went up on the river about 50 miles away at this bridge.

Mark: Now in China, where were you specifically? Do you remember?

Williams: Pashan. Pashan, China.

Mark: That must be in the southern part of China someplace?

Williams: It's about thirty miles from Burma. We were supposed to link back up with our outfit down in Burma, but when the road got opened up, the traffic only went one way. So we had to go back. We caught a plane out of Pashan, China, to India.

Mark: Now you mentioned that in China you finally got shot at.

Williams: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: Why don't you just describe that to me?

Williams: Well, we were sitting up on this mountainside, and the Salween River went down through our gorge, and the bridge had been blown up. And when we got in there, they finally got the bridge back up, and we were there to protect the bridge. We was in three raids that the Japs put on that bridge. But half the time they were flying under our guns. We didn't think anybody would do that, but they came to the gorge with a bomber. Mitsubishi. They made those motors for a car I bought one time, like Chrysler. And made my Mitsubishi on these son-of-a-bitches! [Laughs.] Bombed the hell out of us, and here I'm driving a car with their name on it!

Mark: So you were in India for a long time, and you were bored, and then you finally got involved in combat. Were you glad to be in combat, or were you sorry you ever left India? What's going through your head while you're being shot at, basically?

Williams: Wished I was back in India, not getting shot at, that's for damn sure! No, every time they caught us, we weren't dug in or anything. Seemed like they knew – must of known, I don't know. But we were sitting out there in wide open spaces.

Mark: Now did that happen very often, once you got to China?

Williams: Three times up on the Salween River bridge on the Burma Road. And most of the time there were about 35 or 40 planes coming in on us. Some were bombing and strafing us and some were bombing the bridge. So you may ... tuning into that Tokyo Rose told us that Roosevelt was dead. We didn't believe her, you know –

Mark: Now was this when he actually died?

Williams: Yeah, yeah, the actual thing. So we didn't know a damn thing about it until we got back to American headquarters. Back in Pashan, China. We saw the flags at half-mast, so we thought, what the hell, she must be telling the truth. She always told us where we were anyway. She told us when we left Calcutta, and she told us where we were going. Quite often she'd say the name of our outfit – our outfit is only a separate battalion. Real small unit, you know. You're only talking about 180 men for a battery. A battery is only eight 40-millimeters and eight 50-caliber machine-guns, that's all it was. Get one of those big units, like, a big division, you know –

Mark: So was there an American radio broadcast?

- Williams: Yeah, sometimes you could get it. The trick was if you find a radio, and it would finally come in on the radio, but there was no battery. So I'd go down and steal batteries wherever I could steal batteries from. [Laughs.] In India it wasn't too bad. You go down to the railyards, 'cause the road graders and bulldozers coming in, you know, had batteries on them. That's the only way we got a battery.
- Mark: See, I'm sort of interested in why you decided to listen to Tokyo Rose in the first place? Was it entertainment?
- Williams: Entertainment? Well, it was about one of the only things I could get.
- Mark: I see.
- Williams: But Axis Sally came in pretty clear on the first channel station too. BBC, Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally. They gave us the news, so you had to make up your mind what you wanted to believe.
- Mark: Yeah. So how was morale? I mean, you were stuck out in the boondocks for 18 months in India at one point. I mean, I imagine it was sort of taxing on people's minds.
- Williams: It was bad for the ones that were around the gun positions. As only about 60% of the guys are at one time. The rest of them are with malaria in the hospital. Malaria, or dengue fever or dysentery.
- Mark: Did you get sick at all?
- Williams: Malaria. And dysentery.
- Mark: So I suppose everyone got sick pretty much at one point or another?
- Williams: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But we never had any venereal diseases in India. But when we got to China, God, we had venereal diseases over there. Jesus, the guys hadn't seen any women –
- Mark: Boys will be only boys.
- Williams: Only thing they saw was these headhunters and headhunter's wives, that'd discourage anybody, you know.
- Mark: So when you get – I'm interested in the malaria thing. This was a very common experience with a lot of GIs. What are the first symptoms, and when do you when know you're sick, and what do they do with you once you start to get sick?
- Williams: You have a high temperature and you're sweating. And chills. Like having an appendicitis. You sweat and chill with appendicitis. Same thing, except some of the people – certain – there all kinds of different, maybe four or five different kinds of malaria. Couple of them are real deadly. That's the kind I had. But a lot of them are the relapsing kind. That was the worst yet. Keep on relapsing from the damn stuff.

- Mark: So at what point did they take you out of your unit and send you back to the hospital? I mean –
- Williams: When you couldn't stand up.
- Mark: 'Cause I read that in certain units, you'd have to have a temperature of 102 or something, before they'd take you out. Where you were, it was just til you dropped, basically?
- Williams: Yup. You know, I had to be carried out. One friend of mine, I think he had 118 temperature. 118, 114. Our thermometers – we couldn't use them. We had to use English thermometers. They were up to 120, I guess. But some of the guys who have hair, they lost all the hair on their body. They're just lucky they made it through.
- Mark: And so then you get back to a hospital – how long does it take to get over the malaria?
- Williams: About ten to fourteen days. When you got feeling good, they put you on guard duty. Or KP [laughs]. Nobody wants to stick around in something like that.
- Mark: So to prevent malaria, didn't they have, like, atabrine pills?
- Williams: Yeah, they came out with that later, yeah.
- Mark: Now the guys didn't like those, as I recall?
- Williams: You could always tell the rookies are coming in. It'd turn their skin yellow. I never had any problem with it. One thing I couldn't take was the quinine. It was a cure. And they had shortage of quinine. Yeah, but a lot of the guys – Sometimes you didn't have the [?]. But then they got around it – said it was a court martial offense, if you didn't take that malaria. [Laughs.] You need a host of water, you know.
- Mark: Now in China I don't imagine the malaria was that much of a problem then?
- Williams: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because we weren't that far away from Burma and India. Before we came back in to link up the Ledo Road into the Burma Road. They linked in down in Bomo, Burma. That was about thirty miles from where we were on the Salween River in China. But after you get up further north into the mountains up to Pashan and back towards Kuaming, the weather was a little cooler, and there wasn't so much malaria back there.
- Mark: Now perhaps I misunderstood, but you went from India to China, and then back to India, is that right?
- Williams: Went back to – We were headed for the United States.
- Mark: Oh, I see. So when the war ended, you were in China?
- Williams: No, when the war ended, I was in Calcutta.

Mark: Calcutta again.

Williams: And you're there in Calcutta, trying to get a ride to Mission Hole, Burma or the ... Well, getting a little ahead of story. We broke up when we left China. We lined up in front of the Chinese army, and we gave them all our [profits?] and everything we had. All of our artillery pieces and machine guns. And we left China and we got to Calcutta, India, and we were disbanded. And they sent us back into Burma at various different jobs, just anything.

Mark: Well, I suppose by this time you had a lot of points. They had a point system going, and you had been in since '42. So you must have been about ready to be discharged anyway.

Williams: Yeah, I had enough points but I couldn't get home. But I – We only had eighty-five points, I guess it was. You had to have – a hundred and something? And we were disbanded in Calcutta. And we were sitting back in different outfits for different jobs. I was full time in the MP outfit in Myitkyina (pronounced Mishina). And I worked at a pumping station, 'cause they pump all their oil and gas too. They pump gas and oil from Calcutta into China. And I worked on one of those oil field rigs in there. Not the rig, but the station, where they store it. [5 Second PAUSE IN TAPE.] And I was smoking a cigar one day, and I was bleeding the water off the tanks – the things had about a foot of water on them, and so -- I was smoking one of my cigars, and I was bleeding the water off one of these big gas things. They had a side glass on them so you could see them – where the water was and where the gas was. And these inspector generals, they were around, and I was smoking a big cigar, bleeding this water off. And they said, "My God, get out of here, or you're going to blow us up!" I said, "No, I'm just bleeding off the water." They took off right out of that damn field! They yanked my ass out of there in a hurry. [Laughs.] They put me right back on the MP duty. Got a PX come in Myitkyina. [Laughs.]

Mark: So how long was it before you finally got the points and got the transportation and got back to the states?

Williams: Well, how long? Took me about three months. First, I reached the outfit I was with in Myitkyina, Burma. I ran into them in Calcutta. I was trying to get a plane out of there. The airfield was run by the British – I was trying to catch a plane. Either that, or it was another week by train and boat and car, whatever. So I was trying to get an easy ride back into Burma. I ran right up where they were and I said, "Where the hell are you guys going?" They said, "Hell, the war is over – we're going home!" I said, "Good, I'll go with you!" They said, "No, no. You have to go back to Burma and get your papers." Oh, God! Hooked me up on that one. And I get back in Myitkyina they say, "Well, you've got to destroy all that equipment before you go. You got all these planes out here to destroy, and all those bamboo shacks out there with clothing and rations and cigarettes in them. Got to burn them all down and get rid of that stuff." So I went out there – this one had "Wings" cigarettes: they're the worst damn cigarettes I ever smoked. I was glad to burn down that whole damn horrid house full of "Wings" cigarettes right there. They wouldn't let us give it to the natives.

Mark: Why not?

Williams: They said that would hurt the merchant, the manu – the American factories from selling them to the natives over there.

Mark: I see.

Williams: Hell, the natives didn't have any money anyway. They know how to do without. Just like I do – I don't have any money: I just do without. It's real simple. So I get down to Calcutta, and the guy says, "If you go up to China, you can catch a boat." He says, "The boat's going in there." And I get in there in Canton, and the guy says, "Get the hell out of here," he says, "The Americans aren't too welcome in here." So I went to Shanghai, tried to get a boat. And the guy says, "Your best bet is to go to Karachi, India." He says, "There're boats leaving there." So I finally got a ride back down to Calcutta. And I go over to the railroad station and get a train over to Karachi, India. I ran into this outfit over there. I asked this guy if I could go with them. He said, "Yeah, get on the boat." [Laughs.] I was by myself. And I got on the boat, and I didn't have a place to stay, so they gave me a cot. And I nailed that thing down on the deck til we hit the Azores. Had a big storm coming out of the Azores. And the guy said, "You can't stay out here. You got to go in the galleys, sleep in the galley in there." So I slept in the galley til we hit New York.

Mark: So you got back to New York, this must have been, in '45?

Williams: December the 5th.

Mark: Just before Christmas.

Williams: And I got discharged on December 7th.

Mark: And so then – what did you do after that? Now you're a discharged veteran-G.I. – time to get your life back on track. What were your priorities? What did you want to do once you got out of the service?

Williams: I didn't have an idea. I know I didn't own it. Being all my relations were on tobacco farms here and in the coal mines, so I went back to Virginia and stayed there about two months, visited my folks – mother and father. And then, my brother came by, and he says, "We don't want to run moonshine, do we, anymore?" And I said, "No." He said, "It pays to run that moonshine. Especially across the river in Cincinatti. You have to stop and pay a toll." I laughed at that. So he said, "Well, let's go up there anyway." So we end up in Dayton, Ohio. I was heading for Chicago. 'Cause we wanted to get the hell out of there. There weren't any jobs or anything like that, down there. The jobs didn't pay anything. My father ran a business down there in a small town. And it was just enough for him to make a living, and I didn't want to be around him to tell me what to do. So I went to Dayton, Ohio, and I ran into my wife – she's from Wisconsin. And she worked at Wright Field – that's how I got to Wisconsin.

Mark: And when did you first move here? It was pretty soon after the war, wasn't it?

Williams: 1947.

Mark: And you settled north of [?] Wisconsin?

Williams: In Neenah.

Mark: Neenah, yeah.

Williams: A little north of Oshkosh. A little south of Greenbay. Yeah, I got a job over there with a paper mill. That's about all they got over there – a paper mill.

Mark: I'm from that part of the state, I know. After the war, you didn't have any trouble finding work once you settled down and wanted to find work, it wasn't a problem.

Williams: No, no.

Mark: 'Cause after World War I a lot of guys couldn't find work – that was one of the big problems after that war. But that wasn't a problem for you?

Williams: No. You could get jobs.

Mark: Um, in terms of G. I. benefits and that sort of thing. Did you use it – like home loans, or that kind of thing?

Williams: Yeah, yeah, I did. Yep.

Mark: How long after the war was that?

Williams: About four years. 1952, I think. Yeah, and I took a – I went to school – it was a correspondence course.

Mark: On the G. I. bill?

Williams: On the G. I. Bill, yeah.

Mark: Did the G. I. bill cover all your expenses? I don't suppose it was as much as at the university –

Williams: Yeah, they did, on this correspondence course.

Mark: Was it something you think you might have done without the G. I. bill?

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1]

I'd also like to know what a correspondence course would have cost at that time?

Williams: Well, I probably wouldn't have done it, 'cause – I don't know – probably couldn't have afforded it, you know. Just married and having babies and stuff like that. [Laughs.] That was taking most of my money. Finally only had three kids, so it didn't hurt too much.

Mark: And as for the home loan, was it something – would you have been able to buy a house at that time without the G. I. loan? Or was that necessary?

Williams: Yeah, I could have, if I'd kissed somebody's fender. That way, I didn't, you know? {Laughs.}

Mark: That's a factor.

Williams: Guy's got a little pride, you know. Even as bad as you are. I'm bad as anybody else, but there's a limit to how bad you can be.

Mark: So those benefits were helpful to you, um. Now what about medical problems after the war? Now you contracted malaria while in the service – was this something that continued to affect you after the war?

Williams: No. I was getting a 10% disability. It wasn't too long. I got a letter from the VA. They said, "Hey, if you haven't had a relapse, you're done for."

Mark: And you never had a relapse?

Williams: No.

Mark: So you – 'cause some veterans would be stricken with the chills and the relapsing kind of thing. That wasn't your experience –

Williams: I didn't have a tough malaria.

Mark: Yeah. What about emotional and psychological readjustments to civilian life? You left – you were twenty years old. You came back – you were an adult. You were living with your folks for a while, this sort of thing. Any sort of adjustments you had to make back to civilian life? Anything seem strange when you came back, or you just came back to society and picked up where you left off?

Williams: Well, my ma said she never saw me sober before we got married. I don't remember seeing her either before I -- so I think I was out having a good time. I still didn't have my head on my shoulders square.

Mark: After you got out of the service?

Williams: Yeah. Thought that being sober was a little odd, but that celebration can go on for so long, and then you got to face the facts. Especially when I got broke. Got a job and went to work. Got a job at a nice cash register in Dayton. Of course, she worked at Wright Field, so I thought I'd stick around in Dayton for a while.

Mark: Yeah. But you did eventually settle down, and how long did that take, before you really did feel part of civilian life?

Williams: It took about four years... five years. From '45 to about 1950.

Mark: Um, let's see. Oh, veterans organizations.

Williams: I don't belong to any.

Mark: Is there a reason for that? Because you never thought of it, never had time, or you don't like them? I mean, there's a difference --

Williams: Oh, no, I got friends that belong to them. No, I like the veterans organizations. It's just it wasn't convenient, you know. Lot of times it's convenient for guys, but it never was convenient. And sometimes – Veterans of Foreign Wars: they weren't organized.

Mark: Up where you were.

Williams: Yeah. The Veterans of Foreign Wars – they were organized. One thing I didn't care too much about – well I had an uncle. He was in three months, I came back home and he was the head honcho. [Laughs.] And he was telling all these damn war stories and everything, boasting to people around. [Laughs.] I thought boy, I don't want to be in this outfit.

Mark: Now have you been in touch with people you served with in the military? Do you stay in touch with people?

Williams: No, no. The other day I called a older guy on the Internet. Hadn't seen him for fifty years, you know? And I called him up, and I said, "Is this Corporal Pool?" He said, "yeah, this is corporal Pool." He said he was a big farmer down in Indiana and used to go over to Dayton all the time. I told me I'd been over there and lived in Dayton. And then he talked about farming and his pigs and stuff, and I said, well, this guy's is really out of it. I think I've waited too long to find him.

Mark: That happens.

Williams: He was a good guy.

Mark: You've pretty much exhausted all the standard questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to add or anything you think we've skipped over or anything?

Williams: I don't know – I can't think of anything right now. Wait til I get home – I'll think of something.

Mark: Well, I always think of questions afterwards, too. Have to stop somewhere. Well, thanks for coming in this morning.

Williams: Okay. Thank you, Mark.

Mark: I appreciate it – it was very interesting.

END OF INTERVIEW

