

Interviewer: What is your full name and when and where were you born?

Williams: Okay my full name is Alan Sovio Anthony Williams named after my Italian uncle. I was born in Havirov Massachusetts just outside of Boston about 50 or so miles west of Boston in 1925.

Interviewer: Okay what branch of the service did you serve in?

Williams: United States Navy.

Interviewer: And what was the primary unit that you served in?

Williams: I was on several my first assignment would you believe I took my first assignment out of San Francisco and it was a Dutch freighter. I was on the armed guard crew SS Samoltite commissioned in Amsterdam 1940 that was my first assignment. My second assignment I had over working with the RAN the Royal Strain Navy in New Guinea. I was the radio operator and rose up to be radio first class at that time one of the PT radio operators developed an appendicitis and I was called up for duty for two weeks just to replace him until they got somebody. And my permanent installation was Damigoto New Guinea.

Interviewer: Okay what were your parents' names and what were their occupations?

Williams: My I didn't know my mother and my father I knew briefly they passed away when I was two years old. My father I understand was a chef in the Boston area.

Interviewer: And do you have any brothers and sisters?

Williams: Yes I have one brother he's still living. He's retired he makes fun of me he asks me why I still work and I say primarily Uncle Sam would sue me for nonsupport if I stop working.

Interviewer: Well how long did you remain in school for a long time you were a college professor.

Williams: How long? I started teaching school at Grunt high school math in 1952. I've been a high school mathematics teacher, guidance counselor, director of guidance and a principle of a large high school just outside of Boston.

Interviewer: So you got the Montgomery GI bill I assume and that paid your way through college?

Williams: Yeah I was a recipient of the GI bill or what they call the citizens readjustment act.

Interviewer: So before you entered the military had you had your high school diploma?

Williams: No I did not.

Interviewer: How far did you go?

Williams: Well let me say this, the principle asked in April of 1942 if we would like to join the service and we could graduate abstentia. Meaning we turn in nine book reports and that was it. After that I received my diploma in 1943 and I graduated from a trade school as well as a high school.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollections of the great depression?

Williams: Not really I grew up in an Italian background two tenant house and we ate typical Italian meals. No not really we were probably I would say lower middle class or something of that nature I would say as I look back at it retrospectively.

Interviewer: So it didn't really affect your family?

Williams: No I don't think it did. They were hard working my grandfather was a skillful organ repair person. He serviced organs can carousels or marry-go-rounds in churches and he was quite in depth at that. He had a good reputation of fixing those organs, organs now are more digital and electronic and it was the bellows and different things of that nature that he worked with.

Interviewer: Were you old enough to have had a job before your time in the service?

Williams: Yes I worked as a bag boy in a small Italian grocery store at 25 cents an hour.

Interviewer: Okay before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat to American from the Nazis and the Japanese?

Williams: I had no idea of course survival was the name of the game in my background. I knew when I saw in 1939 that the Nazis invaded September 1, 1939 they invaded Poland I saw something is going to happen. And something apparently two years later you saw of course Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941.

Interviewer: So I guess you got your information by reading the newspapers?

Williams: Well not really I guess I got maybe through the radio. We subscribed to no newspapers the only newspapers out was the AL Progresso was the Italian newspaper that my grandmother and grandfather took from time to time. I bought copies of it when I was in town.

Interviewer: Did you still have family in Italy at this time? Did you have family in Italy?

Williams: I understand yeah my I understand on my father's side my parents father's side came from Northern Via Chancla and on my mother's side I understand they came from Naples.

Interviewer: So I guess it did seem remote to you, you didn't feel like this was really affecting you.

Williams: No no everybody was trying to Americanize everybody and I somewhat felt a little bit concerned here I was Italian more or less. And many people say well me Williams well Williams is actually Guglieherme. When my grandfather came over in 1904 he came over with the name Giuseppe Greneth Guglieherme simply meaning Joseph Williams. Just as if Giuseppe Verde were to come here he would be Joseph Green so that's how we got the name I got the name Williams.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were and how you heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

Williams: Yeah I heard it when I was in school. I was in junior trade school learning how or trying to learn how to be a printer. And that's how I learned it through the radio not the intercom system but through the school itself.

Interviewer: And at this time was it like that night or was it right then and you were hearing the news how

Williams: Yeah I thought it was yes I saw we had no television of course at that time I heard it through the radio. We had a little tall radio the night I recall I wish I knew where it was it was a Zenith radio and one of my uncles bought it for my grandmother.

Interviewer: Did you listen to the FDR speech "A Day Which Shall Live in Infamy" the following day?

Williams: Yeah we shall have no fear except fear itself yes that is so correct I hear that so many times.

Interviewer: Did you feel at that time that war would reach American shores?

Williams: No

Interviewer: And did it touch your life?

Williams: No I had no idea that it would come to our shores although living on the coast as we did we had to have some cautions. Our headlights we had blacken half way through and then of course there were gas stamps that had A, B, and C gas stamps. And silver was scarce and stockings were scarce as well too.

Interviewer: Well with all of these rations going on did you approve of the way FDR handled his office at the beginning of the war?

Williams: I thought he was rather sensitive. The thing is I look back on it now I keep on wondering of the intelligence of that time now we are concerned about the intelligence of 9/11 but I feel and I may be there's an old saying from Shakespeare "Cove Ye Sake Ye Oh Las" and last of teaching school was not out guessing the people in Washington. I think there are very courageous men and women there but I keep in wondering why the ships were lined up so methodically and the airplanes on the strip were lines up so methodically. And as I think at times you will find out we did have the intelligence but they couldn't believe it as I couldn't believe it myself. They said no no no you know they should have known what was happening but we'll never know what the answer is on that.

Interviewer: So I can see a similarity between 9/11 and all of the stuff that's going on now and the Pearl Harbor and how we should have known something. But all the channels weren't working together.

Williams: Yeah apparently that was the case I understand that could be some analogy of the civil thing. I hope this thing they are settling in relative to 9/11 gets put away and you know that past is the past what has been done has been done. Let's not look at job and decide with anybody what would you do in the late circumstances. I think if they knew you know for certain you know there are many things that many of us do on one day and the next day you have the same scenario and we act differently.

Interviewer: When did you realize if you were drafted or were you enlisted?

Williams: No I enlisted in the Navy yes ma'am.

Interviewer: And when you enlisted did you have a preference to what branch of service or

Williams: Yes I did I had a preference for the United States Navy. Being on the coast I like the water among other things.

Interviewer: What kind of military task did you perform? When you got enlisted did you want something like infantry, artillery, engineer I don't know what types of things they do on the ships?

Williams: Okay it doesn't work that way. They gave me a test and the test was they knew that I handled the line and type printing. It used to be a large machine and was metal and you type it out and you get little metal things for the newspaper. So I was a line a type operator and so they found out about you know as they interview you so they said well you would be good to go to radio school. So I went to radio school at Miami University at Oxford and from there I they asked me what type of and I said okay I would like to go into the submarines. Well it didn't happen primarily because I had a punctured ear drum. So I couldn't go in into the submarine service because of that.

Interviewer: The pressure?

Williams: The pressure yes.

Interviewer: Okay so you were tested for skill and IQ levels and did your well your civilian job did affect your military job so where did you do your basic training?

Williams: I did my basic training up in Sampson. That is on the five Finger Lakes the Seneca up there in New York. I was one of the first to go to boot camp up there they had just opened that up. They used to go to either Norfolk or San Diego or the Great Lakes area. They opened up a base up there in the Sampson a naval base off one of the Finger Lakes.

Interviewer: And when were you selected for more specialized training?

Williams: I never had I only had that one type of training for five months yeah.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your fellow recruits?

Williams: They were from around the area and they were some of the people that I knew and so there was some degree of bonding there. Though basically they were not they were mostly from the Boston Bay area you know my area. In fact one of the fellows that I went in with was a classmate of mine.

Interviewer: Was this your first time away from home or the greatest distance you had traveled from your hometown?

Williams: Yes it was. I believe I guess just before school started each year I hitchhiked to New York to see the Yankees play to see Joe DiMaggio play. And it was that was the furthest I'd ever been from Boston to New York City to Yankee stadium. It was very delightful.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any maneuvers stateside?

Williams: No, no state none at all my first ship as I say was a Dutch freighter so there was no I was not engaged in any maneuvers at all.

Interviewer: How good did you think your training was for the task ahead of you?

Williams: Well I thought it was sufficient. I was a first class and when I went in I was a seaman and a seaman and then seaman twice and then I got third class second class and first class. So I think it trained me quite well.

Interviewer: And so I guess you felt like you were prepared to fight?

Williams: Not really I think I was prepared to do radio work not necessarily fight no. The only time I had was when I did boot training and that was the only time I had a rifle I had never had anything. In our barracks we had rifles we never they were just stacked up but that was about it.

Interviewer: How good were the living conditions in the camps while you were training?

Williams: I thought it was good the food was good and of course it was a large area. And I'm not prudish but I'm sort of a private person and I had to take a shower with eight million guys you know and that was a little bit disconcerting to me but anyway I got into the swim of things and no problem at all on that.

Interviewer: So after your training what unit did you move to? You moved to

Williams: Well they shipped me over by train they shipped a bunch of us in cattle cars. They shipped us from Boston to San Francisco and that was the waiting station to get your assignment some people were. And then I saw you know there was Alcatraz you could see there were battleships there were destroyers. There was an aircraft carrier and I said you I said I'd like to get on one of those things. And I wound up on a Dutch freighter.

Interviewer: Did your unit travel overseas?

Williams: No unit it was just a group. There was gunners mates and there was radio operators and of course there was a Dutch crew a Dutch cook and so forth. But no I had no unit what so ever. But when I went over into New Guinea I was a part of the naval crew working with the royal string of the navy.

Interviewer: And so you departed from San Francisco?

Williams: Yes from San Francisco went to New Guinea.

Interviewer: How long was that trip?

Williams: Gosh I don't remember I know we stopped in the Fiji Islands we stopped in Samoa. And it was very delightful just to you know just excited. We had a couple of bulletins of submarines Japanese submarines in the area but no problem there. We were just a little bit concerned by that. And as we crossed the equator we had a great festivity there. I am now a shell back that means that any person crossing the equator they call them a shell back. And it was quite a riot it was an experience for me.

Interviewer: So you had a really good time on the ship your conditions

Williams: Yeah I thought I did yeah.

Interviewer: how many soldiers were on board?

Williams: Gosh I couldn't tell you how many there were plenty soldiers there, there was plenty of soldiers. There was a detachment of oh I don't know how many maybe oh gosh I couldn't even tell you that I know it was loaded.

Interviewer: Okay

Williams: It was loaded

Interviewer: And when you finally landed you landed in New Guinea?

Williams: I landed in Gamma Dodo New Guinea yeah. That was close to the port there's port Mars vie and there's Milady Bay and I was in Milady Bay Gamma Dodo. Lada, Gamma Dodo all nice beautiful you know New Guinea names.

Interviewer: Were you housed in temporary or permanent barracks?

Williams: Well it was some where you had to have mosquito nets and it was up on a base because of the snakes. So again it was on stilts more or less and it was all enclosed and there were four of us in each in a place it was oh three or four times larger than this. And there was a cot there a cot there a cot there a cot here and you would have to sleep with a mosquito net.

Interviewer: Were there any cases of malaria or yellow fever?

Williams: I had malaria.

Interviewer: Did you?

Williams: Yeah when I first got there then they gave you a when you went to the mess hall you had to take a yellow pill what they call Atabrine. And I turned yellow actually you might say that because I was taking all of that yellow medicine.

Interviewer: Did you have any civilian contacts while you were in New Guinea?

Williams: Meaning what?

Interviewer: Get any civilians information form the

Williams: Well of course any information I got from my uncle and my brother was in the same area he was on an attack transport. And when I sent a letter and my uncle showed me you know I had to put there somewhere in the Pacific. I couldn't say exactly where I was or what I was doing. And ordinarily you would see that but they had the sensors they would just take a razor blade and cut things out. And I understand that yeah that was basically it.

Interviewer: Did you write home often?

Williams: As often as I could yeah. I had what they called a fleet post office number and I still remember it 717 that was my fleet post office number.

Interviewer: When you wrote home did you use code?

Williams: No I did not no.

Interviewer: When you first arrived and you guys would do would you go out on ships or did you just carry freight? You weren't really

Williams: Well we carried personnel.

Interviewer: So you did. Did you see any combat or any type of

Williams: No

Interviewer: Any type of

Williams: No I made some landings but that was about all. On a PT I made one landing and that was it I made several of those things.

Interviewer: And were you still in your same group?

Williams: Yeah I was assigned to the PT primarily because I mentioned because the radio operator had an appendicitis so I substituted for him. That was good duty in fact one of the radio men from the auxiliary control craft came into the radio station and he said any of you guys want to be aboard ship? And I said yeah I'd like to be I said I'm here working with the royal string navy and they are a nice bunch of people. And saw my commanding officer and I said could I get a transfer to the APC Auxiliary Patrol Craft? He said if you want AI and they waited and the ship in the meantime left. And then it hit a mine and it blew up so I was very thankful that the paper work didn't go through.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the officers and the NCOs in the command?

Williams: Some of them you know it's like the western movie the good the bad and the ugly. You know you've got some people who wear their buttons with pride and some think that they're legends in their own mind. But by enlarge they were really nice folks. I think that I had nobody that graduated from Annapolis at the time I had all of my commanding officer were 90 day wonders. They were college graduates and went to the V5 program and by enlarge they were I will say wonderful people. I've met a couple of them one came aboard after I was there and I had my hair down like Tarzan and he said sailor get a haircut. And I told him exactly where am I going to get a haircut? And it wasn't exactly in those terms and the commanding officer called me in and he said I want you to behave yourself with the officers. And he was a 90 day wonder you know nice guy but you know where in the devil was I going to get a haircut in the middle of a jungle you know. Anyway I let it grow down like Tarzan I couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: So did you feel like these officers were adequate?

Williams: I think by enlarge yes I think we were very fortunate to have the Annapolis's although any Annapolis graduate that I know that was in my command. Or at least they were these people who graduated were in the ROTC and the V5 programs.

Interviewer: What kind of equipment and arms did you train with?

Williams: Just the regular Springfield you know just I think they came over on the Mayflower those riffles.

Interviewer: And do you know who your commanding general was?

Williams: I had no commanding general. My we had Admiral Halzie and we had Admiral Nimitz and we had this is how we shook up I didn't realize this at the time. One week we were the fifth fleet and another week we were the seventh fleet, it was the same fleet. And so the Japanese for a little while thought we had two fleets out there you know with full contingent of aircraft carriers and destroyers and cruisers and battleships. But it was only one fleet.

Interviewer: What did you do in your free time?

Williams: Played cards.

Interviewer: Did you write a lot of letters?

Williams: No I did not I just my grandmother read a little bit of English but that was it no.

Interviewer: And most of your friends were already in the navy?

Williams: Yes in the service yeah.

Interviewer: Let's see did you play any sports to pass the time between invasions?

Williams: The only thing we had you know was volleyball.

Interviewer: Did you take any leave time? Did you go to Australia or

Williams: I took they gave me one week and I spent it in Sydney Australia. What a lovely lovely city that is and more than that the people were very gracious. We all had to wear uniforms today of course when the military are off base they can put on their civilian uniforms. We were not allowed we had to keep our uniforms on all the time.

Interviewer: So you ever experienced any type of combat or any type of in New Guiney did you have any missions where you were getting bombed in New Guiney?

Williams: No no further on up the line Landau at the top they were getting hit. We were not getting hit there in the Malady Bay area.

Interviewer: So you never really felt like you had to shoot anybody or you were going to get shot at?

Williams: No no no

Interviewer: How would you describe your cohesion in your group?

Williams: I would say adequate. Of course I didn't travel as I mentioned before the furthest I went was New York City and I was I thought I was I went to trade school and the other people went to high school so I felt a little bit self-conscious about that. But let me say that Uncle Sam through his gracious through his GI bill gave me five years of college.

Interviewer: Did you experience any sea rations or something in between?

Williams: No we had none. Occasionally they would make ice cream you know and something of that nature there. But we had powered eggs and we had spam you know something like that. So too enduring that mess but by enlarge it was eatable you know. But military food it depends on who you are and where you're located but by enlarge I was very satisfied.

Interviewer: How long were you out for sea would you go out and transport troops and just come right back or

Williams: Well we'd come back yeah we'd come back.

Interviewer: So what was the longest time you were on the

Williams: I don't recall the time it took. I would say probably a week or so you know as I say it was a liberty ship actually SS Salmistite yeah.

Interviewer: And did you take showers and shave and sleep on the ship I guess you did

Williams: Yeah yeah yeah

Interviewer: So it became like a mini home?

Williams: Yeah to some degree. You get out there in the sun and take it easy and watch the you would know anytime you'd see seagulls you'd know you were close to shore close to land.

Interviewer: Well you weren't out very long but when you were out did you ever experience when another ship would come close by and you guys would trade food or trade any

Williams: No we'd trade signals that's about all yeah.

Interviewer: Did you feel sleep deprived and over worked on the ship?

Williams: No not at all. One time I the junior commander asked me he said Al could you do something for me and I said yes sir. He said could you stand the watch the midnight watch he said my I'm getting transferred don't say anything but I'm getting transferred and my orders may come at any time. And he said I want you to accept that message and the message was of course in code. But he wanted me there so that was the only time that I had regular duty you know.

Interviewer: And were you promoted during your service time?

Williams: Yes I was promoted three times yeah.

Interviewer: And did you feel that the promotions you received were that you deserved them that they were well deserved?

Williams: Well I guess everybody thinks they deserve something but again I worked hard I was you know I thought I was a pretty good radio operator. And in fact I still am a radio operator I talk with people all over the world. I have a nice antenna close to the house and talk to Argentina and on Sunday's I talk to Japan and talk to a radio network that I belong to.

Interviewer: We're you impressed with the quality of the enemy?

Williams: I only met one and that was I think at the time coming through we were looking at a ship coming in and it was they had a pilot that was picked up a Japanese pilot. And I was very much impressed at his mannerisms but more importantly here I thought all Japanese people were small but to erase that it was a nice looking and it was a college graduate. And I was in the interrogation room and he opened up his wallet and he had his family in there he had two children and so I was very much impressed. I only had one and then of course in one area I was at that we had a prison where a break where we had a couple of Japanese people there.

Interviewer: And so I guess you came to respect the average enemy soldier or would you use other words to describe it?

Williams: No I didn't you know I didn't know what happened there.

Interviewer: What about civilians and refugees did you have much contact with them?

Williams: No none at all no refugees and no civilians. The civilians I had actually were the natives in New Guiney and if we wanted a coconut for example they would climb up there for a cigarette a pack of cigarettes and a carton of cigarettes and that was a delight. I never smoked so when I got cigarettes I just so in order for us to get coconut fresh coconut and what we did with that was something else.

Interviewer: What part of an occupation force among civilians or were you part of an occupation force among civilians?

Williams: No no

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Williams: No

Interviewer: So you never experienced any medical well you did get malaria.

Williams: Yeah I got malaria.

Interviewer: So how was the medical treatment?

Williams: Adequate yeah

Interviewer: Were you ever recommended for a medal?

Williams: No the only medal I have is the good conduct medal and I have the service in the Pacific that was about all. I had no combat medals at all. I was remember being in the navy you know

Interviewer: It's hard to receive medals.

Williams: Well no it's not hard but I just didn't feel like that was my bag.

Interviewer: Were friends and fellow soldiers wounded or killed?

Williams: Well a couple of my colleagues who I found out later on that when I went into the service they went into the army and they were killed in Germany yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a sense of the big picture meaning did you ever know the strategy involved in beating the axis power?

Williams: No I did not. I think basically you know Hitler thought he was right Mussolini thought he was right Winton Churchill thought he was right and of course he was. But again why people do these things is something else. And it frightens me you know men make wars and if men wars men and women can make peace.

Interviewer: And last question were you involved in any famous battles or landings in the war?

Williams: Five landings yeah.

Interviewer: Can you be more specific?

Williams: No

Interviewer: Can you just mention the landings?

Williams: Yeah the landings in the New Guiney area New Guiney coast close to Topy and Tonga I was in those there but I was in back I was (tape ended)