

Interviewer: Oh okay I figured it out there's the photo. Okay I got that and that's a photo of Mr. Williams receiving the Purple Heart in 1959. Okay and let me pull back a little bit okay. This should be recording. Can you look here Mr. Williams? That's good that's a good shot very good. Okay if I can get over here without tripping a cord up we'll be okay. My name is Debbie, Debbie McGaha Gratton with the Memories of Service and Sacrifice Project and I'm meeting today with Mr. Raimon E Williams to conduct an oral history interview your personal account of your years of service to your country. And you've already signed the permission form that we have Mrs. Williams witnessed that and so we will start now we'll say action and we'll take off. Based on our previous time together you were drafted on March 11, 1943.

Williams: Forty three

Interviewer: You were 18 years old at the time.

Williams: Yes ma'am

Interviewer: And you had mentioned you had wanted to be in the CCC but they were only accepting white young people at that time.

Williams: Right the only thing _____ had a WPA job working on the railroad but I couldn't live them crossties they were too much for me. My best bet was to go in the army.

Interviewer: So you were drafted and sent to Camp Lee for basic training. What was that like when you went to Camp Lee?

Williams: Oh in those days it was rough. We were riding nothing but troop trains it was a lot of us. From we left Camp Shelby and rode troop trains to Camp Lee.

Interviewer: And everything was totally segregated at that time?

Williams: Right all of us was negro troops colored troops.

Interviewer: What was your worst experience when you went to basic being a black soldier? Does anything particular come to mind?

Williams: Later I remember something we didn't get no ranking by being in a colored unit.

Interviewer: It was hard to progress in an all black unit.

Williams: Right

Interviewer: All of your officers were white.

Williams: All of them were white. You hardly saw a black officer.

Interviewer: You had mentioned too in Mississippi that they released many of the prisoners from Mississippi.

Williams: From Parchman Mississippi right.

Interviewer: From Parchman Mississippi during the war.

Williams: A lot of the people were in my unit from Parchman.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel going to war with prisoners?

Williams: I was kind of nervous because I was a young a real young man with no experience, first time away from home.

Interviewer: Did your mom cry?

Williams: And a lot of those, yes ma'am. A lot of those people I was with they had a lot of experience. Some of them were murderers and everything.

Interviewer: And you had to train together.

Williams: Right train with those murderers.

Mrs. Williams: How did you get along with them?

Williams: They used to tell me stories you know about what happened what they had done. And if they were telling the truth they were terrible. They would kill and everything robbers.

Interviewer: But you survived you survived basic training.

Williams: But they were good I had a good friend was an army prisoner named Lemon.

Interviewer: Did you guys stay Lemon.

Williams: Clyde Lemon

Interviewer: Did you guys stay in touch with each other through the years?

Williams: He looked out for me sure did.

Interviewer: And after Camp Lee then you were part of the after your basic training at Camp Lee you were part of the Quarter Master 246.

Williams: Right we made that outfit up.

Interviewer: And it was made only of black soldiers?

Williams: All black.

Interviewer: Then it wasn't long before you were shipped to North Africa.

Williams: The main commander was our colonel Colonel McCoy he was a CC commander in civilian life before he got in the army. He commanded a battalion of CC for them.

Interviewer: And he was a white colonel?

Williams: He was a white colonel Henry McCoy.

Interviewer: Henry McCoy

Williams: He led us all the way.

Interviewer: Led you all the way at Camp Lee or after?

Williams: He led us in to Africa.

Interviewer: Oh into Africa and that was in 1944. What was the trip going to Africa like on the ship?

Williams: Oh it was rough I had never rode a ship before. Most of us got sick.

Interviewer: And you were on the lower level of the ship?

Williams: Sure was

Interviewer: That must have made it rough.

Williams: I remember standing up at them long tables eating and our trays you'd be eating and you'd look down and somebody else's tray is under you.

Interviewer: Oh they were sliding around?

Williams: That's right.

Interviewer: What was the food like?

Williams: We didn't have no good cooks then we called them can openers.

Interviewer: Can openers

Williams: All they could do was open a can. All of our food was in cans anyway.

Interviewer: Do you remember how many days it took you and where did you catch the ship at or get on the ship?

Williams: In Camp _____

Interviewer: Virginia

Williams: _____

Interviewer: Do you remember how long it took you to get to North Africa?

Williams: Right we was on there 17 days.

Interviewer: Seventeen days wow.

Williams: Seventeen days and nights.

Interviewer: What did you do during the daytime to pass your time? Do you remember anything particular that you did during the day?

Williams: They'd put about 40 on PK working in the kitchen.

Interviewer: Did you have to peel potatoes?

Williams: Peeling potatoes and like that to feed all of them men. It was about 17,000 on there.

Interviewer: You were on the USS George Washington.

Williams: George Washington

Interviewer: How long did you stay in Africa then? And I believe you said when you were in Africa one of the main things you did was set up tents.

Williams: We set up a holding area for people who were coming in. We called it tent city.

Interviewer: Tent city and people then would come to tent city sometimes before they were shipped on to Europe.

Williams: They were going to different outfits in England. A lot of them were going to France and England.

Interviewer: France and England

Williams: Most of these people were replacements replacing the guys who had got killed.

Interviewer: And at this time I believe you were part of the 3rd battalion the K Unit which again was all black.

Williams: Yeah all of it was black.

Interviewer: After that I believe then you moved on to Sicily Italy?

Williams: Sure did

Interviewer: For about six months.

Williams: I a village and the city was _____.

Interviewer: And how did the Italians treat you as a black soldier?

Williams: Italians were real nice.

Interviewer: Were the Italians better to you than the

Williams: The Germans? Yeah I liked the Italians much better than I liked the Germans.

Interviewer: And they liked the dollars you had to spend too right?

Williams: Right

Interviewer: Did you send any of your pay back home to your family in Mississippi?

Williams: I didn't get but \$20 they give us a brand new twenty dollar bill when we got to Shelby.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: That's the first pay I got in the Army. I'll never forget it, it was the 12th of March 1943. I got my first twenty dollar bill.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you spent it on?

Williams: I sent it to my mother.

Interviewer: Oh that's nice.

Williams: You couldn't get no change everybody had a twenty dollar bill. And we had a canteen it was a canteen then instead of a PX. And everybody went to that canteen trying to get change and them girls told us they couldn't change them twenties there was too many of us.

Interviewer: So you had to send

Williams: That's all they had was twenties.

Interviewer: So you had to send

Williams: I had to send the whole twenty home to my mother because I told her I was going to send her some money when I got paid.

Interviewer: Well what was Africa like before you went to Italy?

Williams: Africa was a lot different than I thought it was going to be. See I thought when we got to Africa we would see a lot of dark people and wild and all of that. But we got to Africa Casa Blanca I saw more white people than I did black.

Interviewer: Oh did you?

Williams: I sure did see there's more white people in North Africa see we landed in North Africa.

Interviewer: Uh huh how did they treat you the white people in Africa?

Williams: they treated us fine. I met a I went to town and I met a man and his wife they were Jews. They had been over in Africa for a year they were from New York.

Interviewer: Really

Williams: And they ____ we sat down and drank wine together and he told me how long he had been over there.

Interviewer: And you still remember them after all these years.

Williams: Right and then there was a lot of people from England because Africa is a rich country. There is a lot of people in there that get their money and go.

Interviewer: Then let's see you went to Sicily for about six months.

Williams: And then too Africa had a lot of American dollars see we got paid in Africa with American money. The only place in the world that paid us off in American dollars in Africa.

Interviewer: Really

Williams: The only thing different the money the paid us in Africa had a gold seal on it on the dollar and our dollars got a blue seal in the states. But they sent special money over there to pay us to pay the army off. See you had the navy and the coast guard and all those merchant marines working on the ship. They had to have money to send back to their people. So the Americans send the gold seal dollars over there to pay us off so the people in the navy could have money to send home.

Interviewer: When you would send your money home would you just put the cash in an envelope or?

Williams: No they made out a it was a white piece of paper but it was like a money order. Your mail clerk would make that out.

Interviewer: I see

Williams: You give him the money he would fill that paper out and you wouldn't see and they would fix it into a money order and send it home.

Interviewer: I see

Williams: But it was just a white piece of paper when you would sign.

Interviewer: Let's go back to Italy. From Africa you spent about six months in Sicily and then you went to Bara Italy?

Williams: Right in Sicily we was in the big city is Palermo and Palermo that city was shelled real bad there was one building left there.

Interviewer: Shelled from the ocean

Williams: Shelled from the sea right the Mediterranean. Germans were all over that place they claimed before we got there and the Americans the navy shelled them out.

Interviewer: And we're still in the 40's here it's probably now about 1944 moving up to 1945.

Williams: And this little island we was on we was on an island in Sicily it was all Italians.

Interviewer: Do you remember all the sounds the bombing the shelling?

Williams: Oh yeah we didn't have much there.

Interviewer: Were you very frightened while you were in Italy?

Williams: After we got to Bara that's when I got scared.

Interviewer: Why were you more scared there at Bara?

Williams: Because they bombed us the Germans bombed us.

Interviewer: And you were part of transport support unit at that time right?

Williams: Right

Interviewer: What would you do when the bombing was going on?

Williams: Jump in our hole. We had a hole dug trench.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: You had to dig the trench during the day.

Interviewer: Drink your drinks during the day?

Williams: Dig your trench.

Interviewer: Dig your trench oh I'm sorry. Dig your trenches during the day and so when the bombing started you would jump into the fox hole.

Williams: Jump in it.

Interviewer: Was this the incident where someone wasn't supposed to come out of the hole and did come out of the hole and got shot?

Williams: Yeah somebody got hit.

Interviewer: Did you lose a lot of friends there in Italy?

Williams: Right

Interviewer: Let's see then you were sent to you spent five days I believe in a rest camp in Rome. Can you tell us what that was like?

Williams: It was nice.

Interviewer: Was this after the VE-Day that you spent five days of rest in Rome?

Williams: I believe it was because see Rome the American wasn't allowed to bomb Rome.

Interviewer: So you felt safe there.

Williams: Right Rome was safe because they had all the churches.

Interviewer: Uh huh the Catholic.

Williams: They carried to the church showed us where Jesus Christ walked in the sand foot prints and all.

Interviewer: You were still quite young then you were 20 or 21 at that time.

Williams: That's right I celebrated my 21 birthday there.

Interviewer: What was your greatest fear while you were in World War II?

Williams: The German bombs strafing. They were strafing.

Interviewer: You must have prayed a lot to survive.

Williams: I did.

Interviewer: Did you get a lot of letters from home or?

Williams: I sure did.

Interviewer: And you must have been relieved when the war was over.

Williams: Oh it was some happy days then.

Interviewer: What was it like when you came home?

Williams: Oh it was nice. I had been away from home three almost four years.

Interviewer: Your mom must have been happy to see you.

Williams: They were.

Interviewer: What was the first thing you did when you came back to America? Do you remember?

Williams: Most of us patted the ground.

Interviewer: Patted the ground thankful to come back and to be alive.

Williams: To be able to put our foot back on American soil again. A lot of people kissed the ground.

Interviewer: Happy days to be back home. Let's see I'm looking at my notes here. Oh you had mentions something about the Singles E's the troops the African soldiers.

Williams: Right

Interviewer: What were they like?

Williams: Oh them boys they were good fellows. But I'll never forget when they joined in our their battalion commander he went to school in America he said. He could speak good English.

Interviewer: Uh huh and they were dark skinned too the Single E troops? Did they actually help you put the tents up while you were in?

Williams: Yeah we were assisted by them and British too.

Interviewer: How did you get along with the British?

Williams: Good the British troop was good they was friendly. They was glad to see us and we was glad to see them.

Interviewer: I bet they had never heard of Mississippi before.

Williams: No

Interviewer: Okay so you came back home and what around 1945 you returned to American.

Williams: Sure did

Interviewer: And what did you do at that time in your military career?

Williams: I had to re-enlist for the regular army so I had to I was on leave they gave me 90 days home.

Interviewer: Oh that must have been nice.

Williams: After my 90 days was up I enjoyed them 90 days. I didn't want to go back in the army then but after my 90 days were up I had to report back.

Interviewer: So you re-enlisted for six years?

Williams: But I didn't know they had stopped farming like they was when I was home.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: They were farming in a modern way. See I thought they were still plowing with mules.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: And working hard and I wasn't going to do that all over again. So I was going to stay in the army it was better in the army than it was back on the farm. And that was only the kind of work you could do was farm.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: And I was getting \$21 a month in the army I mean 50. General Eisenhower made it \$50 a month.

Interviewer: And that was more money than you would have made farming?

Williams: Sure was you didn't make \$50 the whole year.

Interviewer: Oh wow and then of course wasn't long before the well let's see let me look at my notes here. The end of 45 the 371st infantry regiment of the 92 2nd that was reorganized and you became part of the correct?

Williams: Right that was in Germany.

Interviewer: But you didn't return back to the states until 1948 I believe.

Williams: Yeah right sure didn't.

Interviewer: 1948 so you actually were abroad for some time from Africa to Italy and did you spend any time in Germany?

Williams: All that extra time I was in Germany.

Interviewer: Was that in Kitchens Germany?

Williams: Kitchens, Lunenburg and all around Germany.

Interviewer: What do you remember most about your time in Germany during and after the war? Is there anything particular that stands out the most?

Williams: There was no good German women after the war they was terrible.

Interviewer: Were they mean?

Williams: No they wasn't any they were bad.

Interviewer: Were they trying to take advantage of you?

Williams: Right

Interviewer: And let's see you had mentioned when you came back from Europe they were going to send your unit to Fort Benning. And then a commander had learned that some of the black soldiers had

Williams: White wives.

Interviewer: White wives so they were sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey is that right?

Williams: Right a lot of them married then German and Italians too but I didn't I didn't marry mine. I left because I told my mother I would bring my mother said you better leave that gal over there don't you bring her back here.

Interviewer: She wanted you to meet someone in Mississippi huh?

Williams: Yeah right

Interviewer: Which you did and I think you met a beautiful woman in Mississippi must be pretty good you've been together what 46 years?

Mrs. Williams: : Well I'm from Tennessee.

Interviewer: Oh you're from Tennessee well that's even better.

Williams: When I first met her I could eat her up I could have ate her up.

Mrs. Williams: : Don't put that in the tape.

Williams: A year later I wish I had.

Mrs. Williams: : Will you leave that out?

Williams: After one year I said I wish I would have went on and ate her up and got it over with.

Interviewer: Well when you came back home in 48 it wasn't long before you found yourself going to Korea. But before you went to Korea did you go jump school before or after the Korean War?

Williams: Right after.

Interviewer: Right after okay. Well let's go to Korea then before we go to jump school.

Williams: I should have went to jump school in 51 or 52. Darling do you remember when I went to Jump School?

Mrs. Williams: : No I met you after you finished jump school I told you before. I met you in 55 you had just went to jump school and got back to Fort Campbell when I met you.

Williams: Oh

Mrs. Williams: : So in other words you got back from Korea didn't you say you went to Texas first then you

Williams: Yeah I went to Texas and from Texas

Mrs. Williams: : Then to Fort Campbell

Williams: I volunteered for the air borne and they sent me to Campbell Fort Campbell.

Interviewer: Let's go to the Korean War that's where you received the Purple Heart in 1952. If you'd like to hold up the Purple Heart here and I think it's interesting you might want to share with us what you had to go through to get the award. Do you want to recall what happened during a battle in Korea where you received injuries?

Williams: Yeah we had an outpost they wanted several divisions to get and we went up that hill and got it. And with the coming train there was a train ahead and we got it we attacked it one morning. And I didn't get hit until the next morning.

Interviewer: After the fog lifted?

Williams: Right we went up there at the night late evening. It got dark on us took us all day to get up there.

Interviewer: So you did a lot of walking a lot of marching to get up the hill?

Williams: And used our shovels to dig trenches to dig holes to get up just like climbing a mountain dig your way up there. Dig footsteps.

Interviewer: Did you get to stop along the way and take many breaks or did they keep everybody moving?

Williams: They kept us going moving.

Interviewer: Time was important.

Williams: Right

Interviewer: According to this memo that was sent by direction of the President which at that time at the time this was sent in 1956 would have been Dwight Eisenhower. It decorates you with the Purple Heart for wounds received in action on the 31st of October 1952 in Korea. And that was Halloween of 1952 while we were having Halloween in America you were fighting in

Williams: We were having Halloween too.

Interviewer: You were having Halloween too. I think it's great you have a sense of humor but it must have been a very horrifying experience. And you sustain a concussion?

Williams: Right from a mortar. It knocked my gun out I was leading on a machine gun platoon.

Interviewer: Leading on a machine gun platoon?

Williams: Yeah I was assigned to H Company but I worked with Fox Company all the time I was tasked out. See when we got ready to move out Fox Company would call for me to go with them. Fox Company was a rifle company and the company commander would always want me to go to be attached to them. See I was tasked out to the rifle company because H company was a weapons support it had all the weapons. It had the machine guns the ___ rifle and the mortar.

Interviewer: And what division were you in at that time?

Williams: The 7th.

Interviewer: The 7th division 31st infantry right?

Williams: Right U.S. 7th division.

Interviewer: Okay were all the men lost or I think I'm thinking of Pork Chop Hill where all the men were lost because the Chinese had so much man power.

Williams: Yeah ran over them.

Interviewer: Were you ever on Pork Chop Hill?

Williams: Right and a hill called Obaling.

Interviewer: What was it called?

Williams: Obaling?

Interviewer: Obaling?

Williams: It was tough wasn't nothing up there.

Interviewer: How about the hill called Jane Russell?

Williams: Well that's the one I was hit on wounded.

Interviewer: Oh you were coming down Jane the mountain called Jane Russell when you were injured?

Williams: Right they contacted my mother in Mississippi.

Interviewer: Oh they did.

Williams: The Red Cross did because I told them don't tell them. I said please don't tell her because she'll get excited. They said we'll just tell her you're okay.

Interviewer: What was your mother's name Mr. Williams?

Williams: Mattie

Interviewer: Mattie

Williams: Mattie ___ Williams.

Interviewer: So did they tell her you were alright or did they tell

Williams: I said tell her I'm alright and they said okay we will.

Interviewer: Okay

Williams: That field see they were set up right behind the line and they had communications back in the states.

Interviewer: Do you remember the nurses or anybody who recused you from the hill when you had the concussion?

Williams: No I don't remember their names but I remember

Interviewer: I mean after you had come to?

Williams: Right

Interviewer: And then after Korea that's when you came back to Fort Hood I believe and you were re-organized with the 11th air borne.

Mrs. Williams: : Yeah

Interviewer: Okay at that time and you mentioned earlier you should have gone to jump school earlier but it took longer for you to get in.

Williams: That's right there wasn't no openings for black colored troops we were a colored troop.

Interviewer: And but eventually you were accepted at jump school.

Williams: After we kept pushing and complaining my whole group was. And we kept asking and so the general General Gavin of the 87th I've got a film here somewhere with him on it he's on that film.
_____ Gavin on that film.

Mrs. Williams: : Oh yeah the one they sent to you?

Williams: Yeah he was the one that made the Triple Nickel made us an outfit. He got Washington to give us an outfit so we could get in there and jump. Because we kept begging him to make an opening in the 82nd for us they said there wasn't no room. There was too many of us for us to be troopers. And so he

got the Department of the Army to grant us an outfit of our own called it 555th 555. And when he got that approved we all went in there. So he's the one that got us that 555.

Interviewer: That must have made you happy when that was formed.

Williams: That's right when that was approved.

Interviewer: But it took a few years to make headway didn't it?

Williams: Sure did to get through. But when it got through it was worth it.

Interviewer: And in 1955 you married your bride.

Williams: That's right I should have ate her up.

Interviewer: How did you meet her how did you meet Alma?

Williams: I met here in Ashland City.

Mrs. Williams: : No you was bringing there was another soldier that was going with my cousin in Nashville.

Williams: He met her cousin.

Mrs. Williams: : And you had the car and you brought him down there.

Williams: And I had the car so I brought him looking for her cousin. And she told me said I've got another cousin that I want you to meet and her name is June. And then she said I don't know if you want to meet Alma or if you can keep up with her. I said yeah I can keep up with her.

Interviewer: That challenged you huh?

Williams: Right I said I want her so that's how I met her.

Interviewer: Had you already completed jump school when you met

Williams: When I met her I had just finished. I was one of them little red hot troopers.

Interviewer: Oh I know you look good in uniform.

Williams: And we were bad. And we were told we could whoop any five people. We believed it we believed it.

Interviewer: Here you are Mr. Williams in uniform after jump school.

Williams: Right now I was really hot stuff then. You couldn't tell me nothing.

Interviewer: Was that true of all the paratroopers?

Williams: Every one of them. When they got them silver wings you couldn't tell them nothing.

Interviewer: The silver wings and the jump boots and I remember

Williams: And they would beat it in your head that you could whoop five men and we thought we could whoop. I know I got whooped one night over in Alabama. I jumped on a bunch of people a bunch of boys and they beat me good.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was about? Was it about being a paratrooper?

Williams: It was about a girl and we were all in a place drinking beer and I told them I'd whoop all of them to come on outside. And we bailed out there and they all got on me they were hitting me everywhere.

Interviewer: Then you found out that a paratrooper couldn't always

Williams: Couldn't always whoop a bunch. That taught me a lesson. But they had to show me.

Interviewer: As part of the service with the 11th air borne at that time you were part of the 502.

Williams: 502 five hundred and second infantry best infantry on Fort Campbell today. That outfit it good.

Interviewer: Uh huh and you were assigned then to Fort Campbell for quite some time before you were sent to Fort Bragg. When did you go to Vietnam?

Williams: From Fort Campbell.

Mrs. Williams: : 1968

Williams: Sixty eight

Mrs. Williams: : You came back from Germany in 67 and you went to Vietnam in 68.

Williams: Right because the 101st was getting ready to go.

Mrs. Williams: : They were already over there when we came in from Germany.

Williams: No one brigade was over there.

Interviewer: How would you compare the war in Vietnam to World War II and the Korean War? This is your third war now.

Williams: That's right and every one of them was different.

Interviewer: It must have been harder to leave when you went to Vietnam you had a family then.

Williams: It was

Interviewer: And you had two sons by that time right?

Williams: Right one of them was born the day I left.

Mrs. Williams: : No he was born three days in other words he was born you left three days and I stayed in the hospital three days. You left five days in other words I stayed in the hospital he was born June the 10th and they let me come home June the 13th and you lefty the 14th or 15th anyway you was only here a couple days after he was born.

Interviewer: Was that Brian?

Mrs. Williams: : Yeah that was Brian.

Williams: I left the same day.

Mrs. Williams: : No you was here two or three days.

Interviewer: And your oldest son Ray who is currently now in the year 2001 he's the Fire Marshal for Clarksville Tennessee how old was Ray at the time you left for Vietnam?

Mrs. Williams: : He was nine years old.

Interviewer: He was nine.

Mrs. Williams: : He was nine years old.

Interviewer: And a new baby which you just saw for one day then you were deployed for Vietnam.

Williams: That's right

Interviewer: But how you said all three wars were different.

Williams: Well Germany was lines like.

Interviewer: All the mines?

Williams: It was lines.

Interviewer: Oh lines.

Williams: Boundaries but in Vietnam there wasn't no boundaries.

Interviewer: Just a jungle.

Williams: A street fight mostly.

Interviewer: Of course by the Korean War the army was integrated so that was a change and it was fully integrated by the time we were in Vietnam. Was that a good thing for you?

Williams: Right it was much better when they integrated the army.

Interviewer: And you were a paratrooper when you went to Vietnam. What was that like?

Williams: That was good I think.

Interviewer: You had your wings.

Williams: That's right I had them silver wings my pride and joy.

Interviewer: Do you remember any jumps in Vietnam?

Mrs. Williams: : He didn't jump in Vietnam.

Williams: We didn't jump in Vietnam.

Mrs. Williams: : There wasn't but one outfit that jumped in Vietnam.

Interviewer: Oh was there.

Mrs. Williams: : It was just

Williams: The 175th

Mrs. Williams: : Yeah 175th and they came in here from Italy didn't they? Wasn't their headquarters in Italy?

Interviewer: What did you do when you were in the Vietnam War? What would a typical day maybe have been like? Do you remember anything particular? Mr. Williams. Where were you what city were you near in Vietnam? Were you near Saigon or?

Williams: In Benwy

Interviewer: Benwy

Williams: That was our headquarters Benwy.

Interviewer: Were you still with the 502nd at that time or were you now with the 101st?

Williams: I was with the 502nd.

Interviewer: You were still with the 502nd at that time.

Williams: And after I got over there they put me in the maintenance battalion 801st.

Interviewer: Maintenance battalion the 801st maintenance battalion.

Williams: That's where I got promoted I made my rank.

Interviewer: Okay oh I remember you had mentioned when you were in Vietnam one night everything might be okay the area you were in and the next day it might be covered with mines.

Williams: That's right that was a different you see you didn't have that in the Korean War.

Interviewer: In the Korean War you still had lines did you still have lines in the Korean War?

Williams: No we in Korea we had a trench all the way across Korea.

Interviewer: So you had a boundary?

Williams: A boundary _____.

Interviewer: So how did you determine when you were in the war in Vietnam how far to go or not to go?

Williams: We had boundaries.

Interviewer: But they were hard to decipher probably in the jungle?

Williams: Yeah when you get out there in that jungle right.

Interviewer: What was the food like in Vietnam?

Williams: Sometimes we got hot meal but mostly it was five in one.

Interviewer: But a little bit better than what you had in World War II and the Korean War?

Williams: In World War II the food was ____ we had sea rations and K-rations.

Interviewer: Uh huh and the weather of course was a lot different for you.

Williams: Sure was

Interviewer: You spent I believe 29 years and nine months.

Williams: Right and my son Ray spent four years. And he asked me was something wrong me for staying in longer. He said dad was something wrong with you for staying in?

Interviewer: In other words he was surprised you were able to

Williams: To survive that long.

Interviewer: To survive that long.

Williams: He said he didn't see how I lived in the how I made it. He couldn't hardly stay four years.

Interviewer: We should also mention your son Brian who I had the pleasure of meeting when he worked for Charter Communications now he's a camera operator in Nashville right?

Mrs. Williams: : Yeah in the media well right now I think its Comcast or something in the _____media but they are affiliated with _____ media they was with AT&T but they changed I think he said Comcast I think he said id what they are with now. They changed over a couple of weeks ago he's in advertising the advertising part.

Interviewer: Uh huh who do you think had it rougher during this time you were in the service Mr. Williams you or your wife?

Williams: I had it rougher. She was living like a fat rat.

Interviewer: I'm sure she missed you a lot though.

Williams: All my pay was coming to her.

Interviewer: Uh huh and you were the lonely soldier abroad.

Williams: That's right

Interviewer: Away from home and away from the children.

Mrs. Williams: : Yeah but you have to learn how to survive by yourself though because it got kind of rough sometime but you know that everything happens sometime.

Interviewer: Right

Williams: She knew how to make it she could make it.

Interviewer: Well I'm glad the two of you made it together for 46 years. Where do you think America would be today without us having fought these wars that you've been in Mr. Williams?

Williams: I'm going to tell you the truth I don't know. I know we would have been in bad shape have a long ways to go during the 40s during the Japan war. It was a long way to go to fight a war but that was the right idea.

Interviewer: Heaven forbid of we hadn't have stopped Hitler.

Williams: We had some good leaders. Oh George S I was looking at a film the other day on the TV.

Interviewer: Oh General Patton?

Williams: Right he was a _____ that British General.

Interviewer: You said that I believe you had a chance to meet General Patton while you were in Europe?

Williams: Right he talked to us he talked to everybody on our

Interviewer: Did you visit any concentration camps in Germany after the war?

Williams: I got to go into one in the village. Nothing but bones in it skeletons where people had died.

Interviewer: Uh huh the Korean War

Williams: Old Hitler was a bad boy.

Interviewer: The Korean War and the Vietnam War must have kind of seemed like a piece of cake compared to World War II.

Williams: It was it did but it was tough at times.

Interviewer: Was it in Vietnam where there was some unit I believe you had mentioned maybe it was in World War II I believe where there was the German soldier that had the helmet with an ear exposed?

Williams: That was during World War II the Germans had a helmet with a cut out on the side where they wore earphones.

Interviewer: And who was it that was given an order to go back to cut as many left ears off as possible?

Williams: That was that ___ battalion commander.

Interviewer: From Africa the African troop.

Williams: Right when he addressed us he told us that his men were instructed to go out and get the left ear of a German soldier and they got awarded for how many they brought back how many left ears. They carried a sack on their side a little old sack a bag.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: And they would drop that ear in that bag.

Interviewer: Did you ever see actually see the ears they brought back?

Williams: No they had them though they said they had them on their side. I didn't look in there I didn't check the bag though. And he told us that if we feel somebody feeling our helmet while we were asleep to don't jump up and start fighting said just lay still don't get worried. Said it's one of his men checking out our helmet to see if we were Americans or Germans.

Interviewer: Oh dear.

Williams: Said they are looking for that cut out on the side of the helmet.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Williams: And said they crawl

Interviewer: And mainly their main weapon was a knife.

Williams: They had their knife and they kept it sharp. That thing you could shave with it.

Interviewer: Well what

Williams: I didn't sleep too good after he told us.

Interviewer: I bet I bet you didn't and you were still so young.

Williams: I was jumping up and down all night.

Interviewer: What was the weather like while you were sleeping on the ground?

Williams: Oh it was cold over there.

Interviewer: You must have missed home a lot.

Williams: I did.

Interviewer: Do you feel like America has appreciated the sacrifices that you made in three wars?

Williams: In some ways.

Interviewer: You probably or did you feel more appreciated after World War II and the Korean War than you did after Vietnam?

Williams: No I felt more appreciated after Vietnam and Korea.

Interviewer: Do you think you felt more appreciated after those wars because the army was then integrated?

Williams: You had more freedom.

Interviewer: Did you feel more respected as a black soldier after those wars?

Williams: Right now the army taken advantage of the colored troops during World War II. Instead of promoting us they come out with an order to let you act. But see if I was leading a platoon I could still lead that platoon and they would make me an acting sergeant. I wouldn't get no pay but I could wear the strips. I could wear the strips and be a sergeant and the same authority but I wasn't pulling no money. But they come out with that and they would make that in our unit in the colored. They let the colored act. You had a First Sergeant sitting in the order room with a private he's setting up there with First Sergeant strips on he wasn't getting paid but he was acting First Sergeant. Now that's something they came out with and I think that was wrong. They took advantage of us.

Interviewer: Right they gave you the responsibility

Williams: They gave you the responsibility you were doing the job but wasn't getting paid.

Interviewer: Not getting paid and not getting recognized for it.

Williams: We called them acting Jack. And they made a lot of us acting Jacks instead of paying us. But during the Korean War we were actually getting paid we made strips and got paid.

Interviewer: I believe you also mentioned when you came back from I believe it was when you came back from Vietnam and you got off the plan and you had never heard the term Afro American before.

Williams: Right they changed our name three times. So when I left it was colored troops and then it went to what, what was number two?

Mrs. Williams: : I believe number two was you were the Negro Troops.

Williams: No when we left it was Negro.

Mrs. Williams: : They were going no you was colored troops in World War II.

Williams: I know but when we left it was Negro and then it

Mrs. Williams: : I don't know when they named them African American I think it was after Vietnam.

Williams: No it was Negro on our roster. See our company roster they used to type it up and they had to put on there your nationality. And on our roster at the end of our name was Negro just NEG that was for Negro. And the white it was CAU Caucasian and Spanish let me see what it was something it was SP I believe anyway and Porto Rican they had a P. But that roster had an abbreviation at the end of your name whatever your nationality was.

Interviewer: Uh huh and later it became African American.

Williams: It changed to African and I didn't know where that came from. That was when I came back from

Woman in background: I didn't think that was Vietnam I didn't think they changed it in Vietnam. I don't know when they changed it to African American. I think it was in it was in the 60s wasn't it? I believe it was early 60 or early 70 one.

Interviewer: Probably

Williams: Early 60s

Mrs. Williams: : No you came back from Vietnam in 69 and I think you was still a black soldier in 69 African American was changed after that.

Interviewer: In the 70s.

Mrs. Williams: : Probably the 70s in other words they was using that word but they didn't really change to Afro American until the 70s I think.

Williams: they went to black.

Mrs. Williams: : They went to black 60 something I remember when they went to black. And also when they went to black they quite putting your race on the manifest.

Williams: On the roster.

Interviewer: Right and you retired in 72.

Williams: Right

Interviewer: But I believe

Williams: I retired as a black soldier.

Mrs. Williams: : No you retired in 72 right. You retired a black soldier.

Williams: I think they were calling you black soldiers.

Mrs. Williams: : I don't know what came after that and I think you was out of the army by that time. You might of heard it but I think you was out by that time. Were you still in? I don't know then. The only thing I knew about that was for race purposed they used to give us an asterisk for your race and then the department changed the asterisk. They said they had to drop that because people were complaining they weren't making rank. Well okay when they changed the asterisk

Williams: They called for a picture.

Mrs. Williams: : They called for a picture.

Williams: I've still got my picture.

Interviewer: Do you?

Williams: You had to send a whole in uniform.

Interviewer: They wouldn't put a footnote but you had to send a picture.

Mrs. Williams: : Because they called here one night and told him he was supposed to be up there and send his picture in and they called him at night and said you've got to get here tomorrow morning because you've got to go up and get your photo. One for the department of army and he's still got that.

Interviewer: Mrs. Williams if you could come over here under these cords you could come over with your husband. We have you talking on the tape but we don't have you on the video.

Mrs. Williams: : I think I better come over there for a few minutes I should have stayed out of it.

Interviewer: If you could come across this way.

Williams: Pull this over and sit down.

Interviewer: Well she'll probably have to be here to be in the

Williams: In that camera.

Interviewer: In the shot with you. In fact I'll try to make it wider so I can have both of you in here. Okay well you can sit in the front I don't think we can pick that I have a wide shot now.

Mrs. Williams: Is this here fine?

Interviewer: Yeah now I have the military wife also here. So and you guys met in 1955.

Mrs. Williams: 1955 yeah

Interviewer: Let me get that walker away. So what's it been like being the wife of a black soldier all these years? You had mentioned something about something that happened at Fort Campbell and you spoke up because you remembered what it was like.

Mrs. Williams: Was it the commerce well I'll say it like this being a military wife and being black it was good days and bad days because he has always been a dedicated soldier. He worked hard a lot of the men did at least I know he did. But he said he had to so it and everything and I've had a good life I'd say a pretty fair like and everything.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you couldn't say anything because you were a black military wife?

Mrs. Williams: In other words a wife white or black knew how far to go by saying anything in the military. Because anything you said that was wrong and they thought it was wrong the husband got in trouble for it. That part I do know.

Interviewer: Right so it didn't matter so much

Mrs. Williams: It didn't matter so much.

Interviewer: As far as a race issue.

Mrs. Williams: Race issue as saying things and anything the family did that was wrong the military wives the husband was the one that got it would have to be accountable.

Williams: We were responsible.

Interviewer: So you were careful.

Mrs. Williams: You had to be careful at least I tried to be.

Interviewer: What would either one of you like to add to this account of Mr. Williams's service as a veteran?

Mrs. Williams: Well I think he has had a real good life. In other words I'll put it like this being born on a plantation and the military was actually the only kind of job he really could take that took care of him everything he got. He made it while he was in the military.

Williams: My first job was a I never had a job other than farming.

Mrs. Williams: Well you had a farm job.

Interviewer: Had you completed high school when they drafted you?

Williams: No that was one of the things that really hurt the American army.

Interviewer: Drafting everybody so young?

Williams: And right and without finishing school that hurt us. Because in 1948 they raised the level you had to have so many years of school to remain in the army in 1948.

Interviewer: What

Williams: You had to have an IQ of 90 or above. And that hurt a lot of people a lot of people had to leave the army. They had me to get out and my company commander said told the first sergeant you go down there and get Williams they had one company that they would put everybody in that was at Fort Benning. They put everybody over in that company to put them out. They had a discharge 369, 368 and 369 there were two discharges. And they were giving them discharges out like hotcakes. You could get one for something you told.

Interviewer: Were they trying you say they were trying deliberately to get some of them out?

Williams: That's what they were doing putting a lot of them out.

Interviewer: Rather than training?

Williams: There were too many of us in there. This was in 1948 and 49.

Mrs. Williams: Was that black soldiers had to go there too?

Williams: Yeah

Mrs. Williams: Okay I didn't know nothing about that.

Williams: They were sending them back from Germany and reclassifying them in Fort Dix and sending them to Korea.

Interviewer: What

Williams: A lot of people was 368 out of the army and then reclassified and went to Korea and fought in Korea that were black. And they said they weren't fit for the army I met two or three guys that were made sergeant after being 368 from Germany and went to Korea and made sergeant stayed in the army.

Interviewer: What I know Ray has children but you don't have any great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Williams: No we don't.

Interviewer: What would you want to say in the year 2001 to great-grandchildren in the future that might see this tape Mr. Williams about your experience? Or what would you recommend to them if they were considering a military career?

Williams: Education make sure to get a good education. That's why I sent both of my kids to college because I learned that an education is the best thing to have in the military to advance. So I sent both my kids to college and I didn't finish high school.

Interviewer: Then you've given more than a third of your life to being a soldier. To service and sacrifice. It's an honor to meet you today and talk to you about your experience.

Williams: I enjoyed meeting you too to explain some of my career and my ups and downs. I really appreciate it being recognized.

Interviewer: You're quite welcome. You're one of you're the first veteran that I've interviewed that's been in three wars and a member of the Triple Nickel also. You're 78 years old today and been married 46 years and still have relatively good health I'm glad you were able to talk to us today.

Williams: I'm in pretty good shape for an old man.

Interviewer: Well Mrs. Williams is keeping you young.

Mrs. Williams: I won't say it on tape.

Interviewer: Well thank you both so much. Have we left anything out that you want to mention? We probably have maybe five minutes left on the tape.

Mrs. Williams: I think that's about all I think he's done told you everything. He probably will remember some later but we've enjoyed having you and everything. And after listening to some things he said I heard a lot I didn't even know because he doesn't discuss the military. He never has very little every once in a while he may say a few things but down to it no.

Interviewer: Well we have to thank Sidney Brown for coordinating our meeting and the tapes will eventually be in the Wings of Liberty Museum and we will have a written transcription. And then the tape will you will also receive a copy of the tape and the Custom House Museum in Clarksville so. Thank you so much for all you've done for America and for Clarksville too.

Mrs. Williams: Oh yeah in other words.

Williams: I've enjoyed my stay.

Mrs. Williams: When he got ready to retire we had a good friend that lived in _____ me and her was real close and she always said that we was going to retire close together. So I wanted to move up there and he said no said we're going to stay by the 101st because you're from Tennessee and I'm from

Mississippi and we can get on home for anything. Said we'd be up there we don't make much money we wouldn't get a chance to

Interviewer: Actually with the price of gas now.

Mrs. Williams: With the price of everything he said I don't think I want to stay there.

Interviewer: Okay I've got a good shot now. Today is May the 15th 2001. Thank you again so very much.

Williams: Thank you too

Interviewer: Want to give me a salute Mr. Williams.

Williams: Thank you for recognizing me.

Interviewer: Thank you