

OLYMPIAN ORAL HISTORY

ARCHIE F. WILLIAMS
1936 OLYMPIC GAMES
TRACK & FIELD



AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words. In the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-Specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

ARCHIE F. WILLIAMS

1936 OLYMPIC GAMES - BERLIN
400-METERS
Gold Medalist

INTERVIEWED:

June, 1988
Santa Rosa, California
by George A. Hodak

ARCHIE F. WILLIAMS

Interviewer: George A. Hodak

Hodak: Today I'm in Santa Rosa, California, at the Santa Rosa Air Center visiting with the gold medalist in the quarter-mile at the 1936 Olympics, Archie Williams. First off Archie, I'd like you to tell me where and when you were born and then talk some of your family and childhood.

Williams: Well, I was born in Oakland, California, May 1, 1915. We had a typical three-kid family, nothing unusual to talk about. I was the oldest, my sister was a year younger, and my brother was a year younger than she. My dad had kind of an interest in real estate and it seems like we moved about five times over a period of 10 or 12 years. So I had a chance to live in north Oakland, west Oakland, east Oakland, Berkeley, south Berkeley, and north Berkeley. We really got around a little, but in some ways it was nice because I got to meet a bunch of different kids. So I felt that I had a larger number of friends than I would have had otherwise. At that time, the Depression hadn't quite started yet but things were pretty austere. I think my dad had a car. The first car we had was a 1918 Model T Ford. He paid something like 100 dollars for it. It certainly didn't seem like we were rich, but yet we never suffered for anything. We just took life a day at a time. Of course, I had a lot of relatives around, so we'd go over to Aunt Florence's house. Uncle Cliff's house, and things of this sort. So it was just a typical childhood, nothing to brag about.

Hodak: What were the schools you attended?

Williams: Well, I went to a school in west Oakland called Cole School, and then we moved up to north Oakland and I went to a school called Washington. From there I went to one called Peralto. By that time I think I was in about the fifth grade. After that I went to Claremont Junior High for about two years or so. Then we moved to Berkeley, so I went to Edison Junior High. From there I went to Berkeley High, back to Oakland again, to University High, and that's where I finished up high school.

Hodak: What sorts of discrimination did you encounter as a child? You mentioned the issue of the Boy Scouts the other day. Would you talk a bit about that?

Williams: Well, we can laugh about it now, but at that time . . . well, practically anything that had any sort of social implication was affected by the racial situation. For example, things such as certain restaurants where you couldn't be fed, certain theaters which you couldn't attend, no public swimming pools, and organizations like the Boy Scouts and the YMCA. In fact, we had a so-called colored YMCA, which was nothing more than an old house with a couple of pool tables and some things of that sort. As far as the Boy Scouts were concerned, well, all my friends, who were mostly Caucasian, wanted me to be in the Scouts with them, but I was told I wasn't eligible—for obvious reasons. But it wasn't all that shattering because there were other things to do. It was just the idea that somewhere along the line someone was telling you, "You can't do this because" As I say, it didn't bother me to the extent that it was traumatic. But I still felt, well . . . I was sort of resentful.

Hodak: Now, at any time during junior or high school were you active in competitive sports? How did you evolve into a quarter-miler?

Williams: Well, I don't know that I evolved (laughter) As I remember, in junior high school, or maybe it was elementary school, they used to have things called . . . not decathlon; it

was something where they had several different events. They don't have anything like that now. They had the standing long jump, standing high jump, we had to do so many chin-ups, and then we had to run shuttle relays—run back and forth between posts. It was a lot of fun. I don't remember being that much better than anybody else; I wasn't the worst either. It was just a lot of fun to compete, even though there wasn't anything at stake, just the idea of being competitive. I played baseball and soccer, just what kids generally do with their spare time. But as far as any illusions about developing into any kind of athlete at that time, it never entered my mind.

Hodak: Did you compete in track at Berkeley High?

Williams: Yes, as I told you before, I underwhelmed them to death. (laughter) I guess I might have won one or two races, but most of the time I was second or third. But it was fun. There were some guys I could beat and some I couldn't. So I just said, "Well, today might be my day and it might not." But I enjoyed it a lot. Then when I went to University High, I was the number three man on our relay team which won the city track meet, and that was, at the time, the height of my career, I guess.

Hodak: So when you graduated from University High, what sort of options did you feel you had? What things did you consider before you attended junior college?

Williams: Well, I got out of high school, and at that time the Depression was definitely on. There were very few jobs. I think I was caddying at the golf course and doing odd jobs like that just to make "walk around" money. And this friend of mine, with whom I was caddying together, said, "You know, we can't get any good jobs, so let's go back to school." I said, "What do you mean, go back to school?" He said, "Well, there's a junior college down there in San Mateo that doesn't cost you anything.

and if we can get back and forth and find a place to stay we could get some education." I said, "Well, what do you want to be?" He said, "Well, I think I'd like to be a dentist." So I thought I'd one-up him, so I said, "Well, I'm going to be an engineer." Then we both laughed about it. Well, it turns out eventually both of us made it.

Well, we went down there and we found a lady that had a little kind of shack in her back yard. It had three beds, but no stove or anything. We paid five dollars a week, and we got two meals a day and board for five nights. Of course, that sounds ridiculous now, but at that time it was good for us. And apparently it was good for her, because she was a widow and it was enough to keep the show on the road for her.

In junior college I really got a little bit more serious about athletics, because we had a real good coach, a fellow by the name of Tex Byrd. About the only thing I can say against him was that he was from Stanford. (laughter) He was very supportive and he encouraged you a lot. So consequently, he . . . well, he didn't say that I was going to be great or anything, but he did say, "I think you have the material that it takes to make a college team, like Berkeley for instance." So I said, "Well, you're the coach, and I'll do what you tell me to do and see how it works out."

My first year there at San Mateo, well, it's kind of a blur because I don't even know what the guys faces looked like that won the races—all I know is what the back of their heads looked like. (laughter) In fact, I think I was running the 220 then, and Tex was the one that encouraged me to try the quarter because he felt that I had the right temperament and the right stride for it. So after the first year, which was '34, he got me training for the 440. The times, I can't remember. I think they were around 51.52 seconds, something like that. But then I started whittling a little bit off of it. Finally, in

the state meet up here in Santa Rosa I did 49.8, I think, and also 21.8 in the 220, which was my all-time best up to that time. Then from there, well, he said, "Now I think you have it made as far as being on the team at Cal." That's all he said: "I think you'll make the team." Of course, I had some other things to concern myself with such as the courses I was taking. I was taking pre-engineering, and up to that time I wasn't too serious about school, especially when I was in high school. So I finally decided to really bear down hard on my lessons. Consequently, I would miss a lot of time training early, and I'd end up Well, okay, I'll put it this way. We had to go all the way to Burlingame, which is about five miles from the school, and we'd have to ride the bus. By the time we'd get up there and train and get back all the baseball players had used up all the hot water. So I was eternally taking cold showers. So that sticks in my mind more than anything. (laughter)

Hodak: So all along you had it in mind to attend Cal?

Williams: Yes. Well, that was my goal because nobody in my family up to that time had ever gone to college. Not that they felt that I was obligated to do it, but it was something that I felt was a good challenge and worth trying. At least I could say that I did it. I had everything going for me because I was living at home, and at that time tuition was only 26 dollars a semester. So I went there and signed up. And I'm not sure that anybody in the sports department knew I was there until I went out for fall track. I did pretty well. I didn't make any especially good times—I think something in the 48s. Then Brutus [Hamilton] was working with me, and he had me doing cross-country and other things that were necessary to build up my stamina. Then by the time the regular season came around, I was doing pretty well.

Hodak: And your studies, how did you combine them with your track?

Williams: Well, they weren't that much of a hindrance actually. It just meant that you had to budget your time. In other words, you couldn't just spend time daydreaming. When you had spare time, you studied. When you're running track you're kind of tired when you get through, so you wouldn't stay up too late. What I would do many times would be to get up early in the morning and study, because I felt I was sharper at that time. My grades weren't anything special, but I did pretty well—somewhere between a B and a C average. And since I hadn't had too much background in math and science up to that time, I felt I was doing about as well as I could.

Hodak: You mentioned your coach Brutus Hamilton. What can you tell me about Brutus?

Williams: He was a very wonderful man. He had been a star at the University of Missouri. He got second in the 1920 Olympics in the decathlon and competed again in the 1924 Olympics. He had a tryout with a New York Yankees baseball team. I don't know what position; anything that they needed, he probably could have done the job. He was also a boxing champion of the U.S. Army. So this is just the athletic side of him. Beyond that, he was a very intelligent man, very well-read, and had an excellent way of expressing himself. I believe he was an English major or something of that sort, and it reflected in everything he said and in everything that he did. You could tell that he was aware of where everything was in the universe.

Hodak: As a coach, he was particularly considerate of the athletes?

Williams: Yeah, well he was more of a father figure than a coach. His concern was for the whole individual, and not just a guy that was going to run a race or jump a stick or something. He was quite concerned about how you felt about what you were doing—especially if it looked like you were getting bored or getting tired. In fact, many times he would tell you, he would

say, "Why don't you take a couple of days off?" "I feel fine coach." "You heard me, take a day off. I don't want to see you out here for two days." He wasn't saying it in a negative sort of way, he was just letting you know that he was aware of how you felt, and that he felt that this would be the best thing for you at the time. And that shows you the type of person that he was. He'd never ask you to do anything that was impossible. He would never raise his voice. He would never give you anything in the form of a put-down. He was always positive. What he really projected was: You can be anything you want to be, and I can't do it for you. All I can do is point you in the right direction and give you a push, but you have to do it yourself. Another thing that he was always aware of is how you stood in your classes. He could tell me, to the nearest percent, what my grades were in every class I was taking. He did that with every guy on the team. He didn't have to get after me, but he was really on the guys who started sliding in their studies. He would say that you're not here just to run and jump, you're here to make something out of yourself.

Hodak: Did you stay in touch with Mr. Hamilton after you graduated?

Williams: Yes, I did. I graduated and got into other things, but I'd always go to see him, and he'd write me letters from time to time. Sometimes he'd call up. He knew all the members of my family, and he knew a lot about my family. It wasn't just with me, he was that way with everybody. He would have the fellows on the track team over to his house almost every month or so just to get together and talk.

Hodak: Who were some of your teammates?

Williams: There was George Anderson, and Tom Moore, the hurdler. Tom held a world's record at one time, I think. Dell Fishback was a hurdler. And there was this fellow named [Ernest]

"Mushy" Pollock from San Diego. I'll probably have to get my scrapbook out. There was a fellow named Bob Heavey—we went to high school together—who was on the team.

Hodak: Who were your main track rivals at Cal? I imagine Stanford was one.

Williams Well, naturally Stanford and USC. Yeah, mostly them, especially Stanford—no, especially USC, I'll put it that way. Those were the guys, they were the supermen of track. I wouldn't say that they were arrogant . . .but they had the feeling: Well, we got it made. So it was especially good if you could manage to beat some of those guys, because you knew if you beat one of those guys you were beating the best.

I remember Al Fitch was going to Huntington Park High School, running 9.6 and 21.4, and I think he was just a junior. And ol' Dean Cromwell said, "Al, you know what? If you come over to USC I think I could make a pretty good sprinter out of you." Here he could beat anything they had at USC. That's how well-stocked they were. They had just endless talent.

Hodak: Stanford had no trouble getting athletes to come there either.

Williams Oh no. Stanford had a lot of fellows. In fact, most of the fellows who were on the track team with me at San Mateo went to Stanford. As you know, at that time there weren't any black athletes at Stanford. In fact, one of the things about Tex Byrd was that he made a real hard effort to get me into Stanford, but it didn't work out.

Hodak: How did that go, I mean this effort you refer to? Was he just talking with the administration?

Williams I don't know. In fact, I didn't find out about it until later, but he really tried. He tried to say, "Well, we have a guy

here that you could really use." But, it didn't come out.

Hodak: You never met with [Robert L.] "Dink" Templeton then?

Williams: No, never. In fact, I think that it was destined that I go to Cal. I could stand on my front porch on Telegraph Avenue and look at the Campanile at Cal, so I knew what Cal was all about. We used to go up, even before I got out of high school, and sneak into where the track guys were practicing and crawl under the fence and watch the real athletes perform. I was kind of born a Cal man.

Hodak: Let's talk further of your track at Cal. I know you set a world's record in the NCAA meet, I think it was in your sophomore year, 1936. Talk a bit about that. Do you ever think back and try to account for your performance on any given day and what sort of factors went into that?

Williams: Well, I don't know. I wish I had a recipe or formula, I could probably sell it to somebody. It just seemed like every week I'd do better. I started off doing 49.1, then it got around 48.8, then 48.6, then 48.2, and then 47.7. It just seemed like I was doing it right. And I'm sure Brutus was telling me the right kinds of things to do because it just happened, and I couldn't explain it.

Hodak: Were you running in any other events?

Williams: Well, I ran the 220 and also the relay. The 220 was a piece of cake because I could run the first 220 in the quarter just about as fast as I ran the flat 220.

Hodak: And to lead up to this NCAA meet in Chicago.

Williams: Yeah, what happened in the. . . I guess at that time it was the Pacific Coast Conference, I finally broke 47.0. I ran 46.8,

I think it was, and that was the best I'd ever done up to that point. So the next thing was the AAU regionals at Stanford. There I ran a 46.3, 400 meters. That kind of surprised me, because it was kind of a cold day and I didn't particularly feel one way or the other. Then, I think the next week I went to Chicago and, lo and behold, there it is! (46.1) It's kind of goofy in a way because it was a trial heat, and I was just loose as a goose. I can remember a guy named Jack Weiershauser and some other guy, from USC. They had just finished their race and were standing near the turn there and they saw me coming. They said, "Hey Arch, slow down, you got it made." I started to say—I didn't realize that I was doing that good of a time—I said, "I bet these guys are trying to make me run a lousy time." But I ran on through there. And it's a funny thing. At the end of the race . . . the tape was stretched across a gate, and at the very end of the race, one foot outside of that, was a cement sidewalk. So I could see that coming up. And I don't know, maybe I did and maybe I didn't, but I might have let up a little bit because I was afraid—you know, when you're running with spikes and all of sudden you hit some cement, boy, you can kill yourself. Then they told what the time was and I said, "You guys are crazy." So then I saw them get the tape measure out and start measuring the track—they have to do that—and they had their watches. They were shaking them and hitting them on their knee. (laughter) So finally they said it was official. And so I said, "I ain't going to argue with you." (laughter)

Hodak: So at this time you must have been thinking about the Olympics?

Williams: Yeah, well you're always kind of thinking about it, but it's like a baseball game where you get to the bottom of the eighth inning in a no-hitter, and you just start talking about it and then it goes. So what I was thinking about was the next meet, because if you don't qualify in the next one there's no

tomorrow. We went up to New York and they had the AAU meet, but it was kind of a formality because—

Hodak: They were combining the AAU meet with the tryouts.

Williams: No, this was a week before the tryouts. That's the only race I lost.

Hodak: In '36?

Williams: Yeah. Well, I lost one against USC where I got tripped. But it was the only race that I really lost. I guess it was either a combination of dumbness and being tired. I fooled around and I didn't get a good start and I kind of thought that I could out-kick these guys. Well, it was Harold Smallwood and Jimmy LuValle. I got behind those guys and I just couldn't pass them. The time wasn't fast, it was about 47.7 or something like that, which was just average—not even average. So it was kind of a lesson to me not to take anything lightly.

Hodak: You mentioned Jimmy LuValle. You've told me he had been sort of a model for you.

Williams: Oh yeah, I had seen him run a lot. I saw him run when I was in junior college. I saw him at the Fresno Relays and he made up, oh, 30 yards in a relay race. I said, "Man, that guy's good." Then later on I saw him win the NCAA at Edwards Field at Berkeley, and I said, "That's definitely my man." I'm about his size and all, so maybe I could learn something from him. So we got together.

Hodak: And you got together right there at Randall's Island.

Williams: That's right. That was kind of grueling in a way because the temperature was around 100 degrees. They just had finished it about a few weeks before and there was no shade at all. The

only place you could find was underneath the bleachers. [Matthew] Mack Robinson and I and some other guy found a place where it was kind of cool. We went and sacked out. A lot of the guys, and the other people there, were dropping like flies in the hot weather—losing weight and everything. There again, it was a question of do or die, and a lot of guys didn't make the boat; guys that were supposed to be sure things, but something happened. Charlie Beetham from Ohio State fell down in the 800. Ben Eastman got boxed in and he didn't make it. Eulace Peacock pulled a muscle. He would have made it.

Hodak: The American Olympic tryouts were almost equivalent to the Olympics themselves.

Williams: Oh yeah. Some of these Johnny-come-latelies, like I was, for instance—they never heard of me before or since. But you just happen to have the goods that particular day and it works out for you.

Hodak: So what did you do following the tryouts? What was the interval before you left for Berlin?

Williams: I should point out one thing. Once you make the team you got instance affluence. We stayed at the Hotel Roosevelt. You could eat anything you wanted to, they were sort of giving you the old VIP treatment. So we stayed there for I guess about five or six days getting ready to catch the boat. Of course, that's a big event, because that's the only boat I'd ever been on other than the Southern Pacific ferryboat, you know, going to San Francisco. Here's this big huge ship with all the big chimneys and smokestacks and horns blowing, and they even had a band playing. So the old boat pulls out and there we go.

Hodak: How were the athletes quartered?

Williams: Well, we weren't in first class. And they did manage to get all the brothers together, as you know.

Hodak: What was the thinking there?

Williams: Well, I think it was, you know: Don't you want to be with your own kind? I didn't think much of it, except it seemed to me it was kind of a put-down. It reminded you of putting you down in the galley, all together in the same room. But it didn't matter because we were all friends. In fact, in some ways it might have been to our advantage. But you could still get that feeling that there was something there, that they felt they were doing you a favor . . . or maybe they were making it easier for themselves.

Hodak: Who were your roommates?

Williams: I don't really remember who it was. I think maybe Jimmy LuValle and John Woodruff. I don't remember that part of it on the boat, but it seems to me we had four guys to a room. We were always in and out of each other's rooms anyway, playing cards and horsing around.

Hodak: What else is memorable on board the ship?

Williams: Endless food, endless food. Remember, we'd been training like mad in hot weather and all of us were down to skin and bones. And here you get on this ship, and you get up in the morning and could have croissants, sweet rolls, coffee, cocoa and fruit juice, and then about nine o'clock they'd ring the gong for breakfast. You sit down and order steak and eggs and the whole schmear. About ten-thirty they had another coffee break. Then they had lunch off a menu. Then they had something in the afternoon, tea and crumpets or something. Then with suppertime it was the same thing, right off the menu. Then those that stayed up late could go down to the

galley and pig out on whatever they had around ten o'clock. So you know what happened, everybody probably gained about ten pounds.

Hodak: What were you doing on board the ship to try to keep in shape?

Williams: You couldn't do much. We'd jog up and down the deck, but it was kind of weird. We'd do push-ups. In retrospect, I imagine we would have been better off if they had airplanes for instance, so we could be over there in one day and just continue our training. There was at least a week when practically no training was taking place. So we had to start from scratch. The weather was kind of cold as I remember, and it wasn't the same training. I even got sick one day. I was running and I got nauseated. The coach kind of got worried, but it was just something minor, it worked out okay, I guess.

Hodak: Obviously it worked out okay, (laughter) Who were some of the athletes on board the ship that, let's say, left an impression on you?

Williams: Well, let's see. Guys like Jack Torrance. He was a funny guy, a big old monster of a man, 6-foot-8, about 250 pounds. He'd been a deputy sheriff down in Louisiana. He told a lot of funny stories—stories that reminded you of Burt Reynolds, that type of stuff. It seems that most of the guys I enjoyed talking with and being around were those guys from Louisiana State, [Glenn] "Slats" Hardin, and Billy Brown. There was a kid from Oklahoma, Harold Cagle. We used to call him "short stride." He had an old beat-up guitar he used to play. Well, we'd play cards and tell lies and things like that. Just what you'd expect of a bunch of college kids.

Hodak: And the athletes got along real well together?

Williams Oh, we got along fine. See most of those guys, the average age was probably 21 or 22, college guys. I was a college sophomore, 21 years old. There were a few older guys like Ralph Metcalfe, he was somewhat older; a guy named [Gordon] "Slinger" Dunn from Stanford; and Glenn Cunningham, he was kind of a father figure for all the guys because he'd been around for a long time. Then there were a lot of rookies like myself. But it was just nice to be in the company of people like that; people that you'd read about, that you knew were good. Just the fact that you were associating with those guys kind of did something for you, you know, just to say you were rubbing elbows with those dudes.

Hodak: Did a lot of the guys look up to Ralph Metcalfe?

Williams Oh sure. Well, naturally. He just attracted that kind of attention. He had been in the previous Olympics. He'd been to Europe many times. He was well educated and was just a totally classy guy. He was no nonsense, no jive. But he also had a real good sense of humor. And he didn't hold it up to you, like, "I am great," although he was great.

Hodak: Did he ever talk to you about the 1932 Olympics?

Williams: No, he just kind of shook his head and said, "Well, that's the way it was, there's nothing I could do about it." But he didn't let that keep him from trying to beat old Jesse, for instance, or doing anything else. He was just going to do the best he could, and if that wasn't good enough, then that's the way it was. So it kind of rubbed off on all of us. I was real sorry to hear about his death a few years back.

Hodak: What can you tell me about Ralph Metcalfe's career after college?

Williams Well, he earned a PhD in education. I think it was at USC,

come to think of it. He went to Dillard University in New Orleans as a teacher. I passed through there one time and stayed with him for a day or so. Naturally he was well respected in the community. He got into politics in Chicago, and he was a state representative in the Illinois State Legislature for many years. He did what a lot of us wish we could have done. In other words, he had a complete life all the way. He was just a person that you couldn't help but admire, not only for his athletic ability, but for himself as a man.

Hodak: Let's get back to the ship, when you come into Hamburg and then eventually Berlin. What sort of reception do you recall? What would you say about the German people? In particular, how they treated black athletes.

Williams: Well, when the boat landed at Hamburg they had a band to greet us. And then they took us down to the city hall which was, I guess, hundreds of years old, steeped in heavy tradition. They were making a lot of speeches that I didn't understand, and they were giving out the keys to the city. They were just welcoming us, as I suppose they welcomed everybody. But it was definitely a show of whatever you want to call it, they just wanted to roll out the red carpet. In fact, they did have a red carpet, come to think of it.

Then we got on the train and when we got to Berlin the same thing happened. They took us out to this beautiful area—it looked like a country club—where the Olympic Village was. They had it landscaped and all the buildings were brand-new. In fact, it later was to become what amounted to a military academy. It was set up with cottage-type barracks. Every country had its own dining hall, and since we had one of the largest teams, we had all the goodies. All the foreign athletes wanted to be our friends immediately. They had these tables set up with fruit, cookies, pitchers of milk.

The Village had every facility you could imagine; for instance, things like barber shops. And I even had a tooth filled there. They had all sorts of shops where you could buy cameras . . . well, anything that you wanted. It was like a small shopping mall. We all had what amounted to a passport. In addition to that, we had a card which allowed us to ride any transportation anywhere in Berlin free of charge. All you had to do was show it to the conductor and sit down and you could go anywhere you wanted to. Of course, on the street the people immediately recognized us. They would come up to us for autographs and they would want to talk and invite you in to have a cup of coffee or something. I felt that they really were sincere with their warmth and with their desire to make you feel at home.

Hodak: Were the Germans in any way peculiar towards the black athletes?

Williams: I have no way of even guessing about that. All I can say is that I felt it was very sincere. They regarded us primarily for what we came there to do, and they admired us for that. There was no talk that I heard that was derogatory.

Hodak: So this talk in the German press about the black auxiliaries, that's something you heard about later?

Williams: Yeah. I didn't hear about all that stuff until I got back home. I couldn't read German. I just heard people saying this and that, and I was aware of their super race, whatever, Aryan supremacy—but they didn't prove it us! (laughter) So no. I would say that we were treated as well as anybody there and there were no incidents that I can recall where this sort of thing ever came up. It was just a nice experience all the way around.

Hodak: I read that Alan Cranston, now a member of the U.S. Senate, worked as a correspondent in Berlin.

Williams: Yes, that's right. He worked for one of the news agencies. It was kind of nice because a lot of us knew Alan. He had ran track at Stanford, but he was held back by injuries and didn't get as far as he might have. But I remember seeing him in Berlin. He spoke German and so he'd kind of fill us in on what all was going on.

Hodak: Do you remember much of the Opening Ceremony? Was that particularly impressive?

Williams: It certainly was. In fact, I had the dubious honor of being within 50 feet of Hitler and company. They had this big sort of marshalling ground outside the stadium where all the teams would be lined up. We had our white flannel pants and our Pat Boone shoes and straw hats waiting for the thing to start. And since it was in alphabetical order, we were pretty close to the end. It so happened that Hitler and I think Goering, Goebbels, all the, I guess you might say, big shots were together there. They had a part in the ceremonies. So we were very close to where they were standing. Then of course each country marched in and marched past in review. Then after everybody was in place they played some music. Then a guy came trotting in with the torch, lit the torch, and then they released about 10,000 pigeons. We had these navy blue coats on, and it was kind of a mad scramble there for a few minutes while these pigeons were going around in circles trying to find where they were supposed to go. A few guys got direct hits. (laughter) But it was very impressive. Obviously, since we were in the parade, we couldn't see it all.

Each country had its own uniform. I remember the ones from India; they had those turbans on and they were quite impressive in their uniforms. Then of course the German team all had military-type uniforms, as did one other country. Most of them just had sport coats and things of that sort. The Frenchmen naturally had berets.

Hodak: Tell me, what did you do before your race? When did the 400-meter race come up?

Williams It came towards the end for some reason. The whole thing took about ten days, and we were down toward the end. I know they had run the 100 and the 800.

Hodak: Did you get to see many of the races?

Williams I attended every day, obviously including the day when I ran. We were rooting for each other. I wanted to see Jesse break a record. I wanted to see Corney Johnson break a record if he could, and Dave Albritton too. We were cheering for our teammates. Plus the fact that it was probably the first and last chance I'd ever get to see something like that, so I wanted to make sure I got it all. I wouldn't say that I was there all day, because we were running in the morning. Most of the finals were in the late afternoon, which meant that we could get to see them.

Hodak: After training in the morning?

Williams After training, right. There were two practice tracks, they had a couple of practice swimming pools, and of course they had the other sports like boxing and wrestling that were in another place. I knew a couple of boxers so I used to go over and watch them work out. I don't know how much time we had between the time we got there. It seems to me it was about ten days from the time we got there until the events started.

Hodak: So you were warming up and running using your normal routine?

Williams That's right. I can't remember exactly what Brutus had us doing. We'd do wind sprints and we'd do short races, like 300 yards and things of that sort. It wasn't anything different

from what we had been doing before. In fact, I think Brutus was aware of the fact that all of us were kind of tired. I'm pretty sure he felt that there was no point in just using up a lot of energy when you might need it a little bit later, especially in view of the fact we had to run so many heats in such a short time. You had to kind of ration it out so you wouldn't be burned out by the time the finals came around.

Hodak: Tell me about the 400-meter race itself. You say you had to run a number of preliminary heats?

Williams: The first day we had trials at ten o'clock, and I think the next sets of heats was at two o'clock. Then on the next day were the finals—at three-thirty were the semis and at five o'clock were the finals, which gave us about an hour and a half in between. So I'm sure everybody in the race was just about on edge as far as energy was concerned. So I think it was just a kind of struggle for survival more than anything else.

Hodak: And you benefited from a rubdown before your race?

Williams: Oh yeah. They had a fellow by the name of Seymour Van Blake—I knew his son real well—and he had been a trainer for Princeton University. I met him there. And the weather was kind of cold. He had been a boxer, and he worked with the boxers a lot, and they generally are the ones who really get the good rubdowns. So he gave me one that really made my legs feel nice and loose. I guess you might say that's one of the things that helped me do what I did.

Hodak: Tell me about the race. Where were you positioned, do you recall which lane?

Williams: Every race I'd ever run before, I'd always drawn the outside lane. Well, this time I beat the system to the extent that I drew the next to the outside lane—which was an improvement.

Hodak: Now, in the 400 you run two turns, right?

Williams: Two turns, that's right.

Hodak: With a staggered start, you don't really know where you stand for much of the race, right?

Williams: No, that's why Brutus emphasized knowing your pace; knowing if it was a slow race or a fast race, and knowing, even though you didn't have a clock on you, knowing how, you might say, you're using your fuel. So I guess I developed a pretty good sense of pace because I didn't go out too fast. I was kind of a slow starter anyway. I timed it so that I hit my spurt just as I was coming off of the last turn. That was the only time when I was really worried; and that was the fact that at that point the curved lanes merged in with the straightaway lanes. It was like a railroad track, and I could see where it would be very easy to step out of your lane without realizing it. That was my biggest concern up to that point. Then, of course, I got into the straightaway, and I had a little lead and I held on to it. Everybody was doing his best, I guess they were probably pulling up on me a little, but I managed to hold them off. That was about it, but as far as remembering the entire race, it was kind of a blur because it was so much noise and excitement and yelling and screaming. So I just tried to black that out of my mind and just concentrate on running a good-paced race.

I should mention this too. In going to the stadium from the Village it was traditional for the head coach to ride with the athletes competing in the finals on a given day. The head coach at that time was from Pennsylvania—Lawson Robertson. To make a long story short, we almost didn't make it. On the way there they had this German driver, he was driving this big old touring car, and we were in the backseat. Well, we got to a fork in the road and Coach Robertson pointed and said, "Go

that way." The guy said, "No, that way, that way." They kept arguing to the point where the guy said, "Oh, the hell with it." He got out and was going to walk away. Well, Jimmy LuValle could speak some German, so he went up and called the guy over and he said something to con the guy into taking us there. Otherwise we wouldn't have made it. That was real funny, because it was the finals and if we hadn't made it, well, it would have been "Too bad Jim." You didn't make it, you missed the meet.

Hodak: Do you sense that runners today run the 400 differently than you might have?

Williams: Oh, I'm sure they do. For one thing they run it faster, that's for sure.

Hodak: I mean in terms of pace and approach.

Williams: Well, I guess, I watch them run and I'm just amazed and awed that they can sustain so much speed.

Hodak: It's virtually a sprint today.

Williams: It's a sprint today. And what it amounts to is it's just high tech. In other words, they have these photokinesis things where they can make stickman figures of your stride and of your arm action and things of this sort; so there's nothing left to chance. They can almost, I hear, predict what your ultimate performance might be based upon these kind of studies. And, of course, I'm sure that they concern themselves with diet, with exercise, with stretching, and with just the mechanics of the race. With us, we just sort of played it by ear, I guess, and did what we thought was right, and we did what the coach said. But these guys are finely tuned, so it's inevitable that they're going to do better and they'll continue to do better until they reach whatever the ultimate is. And I don't know

what that is.

Hodak: How does it feel to have won a gold medal? Today athletes prepare years in advance for Olympic competition. Your story suggests a contrast.

Williams: I'll say it was kind of like a pleasant surprise. If somebody asked me, "When did you start preparing for the Olympics?" I'd say the day I made the team. A lot of people prepare maybe two, three or more years ahead of time. Well, when I was coming along it was something like a dream, it was almost a fantasy that you were going to go there. But you always say gee-whiz, what if? But you don't seriously set that as a goal, because it's almost like setting up winning the lottery as a goal. I mean, it's a great thing to think about, but don't lose any sleep over it.

Hodak: Well, how have you thought about it over the years?

Williams: Initially, you're kind of numb. You have to pinch yourself to say, did I really do that? Then it kind of sinks in. Somebody once asked me, "How does it feel to be the greatest in the world?" I said, "What the hell are you talking about? How do you know I'm the greatest in the world? There may be some guy down there in Kenya being chased by a lion that broke my record before breakfast." I said, "I just beat the ones that showed up that day." So I have no illusions about this "greatest in the world," because there's nobody that's the greatest. Maybe for one moment he might be. So I have no illusions about that part of it, because I know guys that . . . I think of all the guys that I had to eventually beat in order to get where I was going. Some of those guys, with a little luck, might have been there instead of me. In some ways, I feel like I owe it to the ones that I had to compete against to get where I finally ended up—they pushed me. I was talking once to Steve Overtt about that and we agreed that you never own a

world's record, you only borrow it for awhile. That's the way I feel about setting the world's record in Chicago and then later winning a gold medal.

Well, even the ceremony was quite impressive, because here you are in front of the whole world and they're playing "The Star-Spangled Banner." Again, I was kind of numb. It's unreal, I'll put it that way. I could think about it more afterwards than I could at the time. That's how I felt about it.

Hodak: Tell me about some of the other races in the '36 Olympics, such as John Woodruff's race, the 800-meter race.

Williams: Well, ol' John, he was an animal as far as running was concerned. He could run at any pace. He could run the first lap in one minute, the second lap in 50 seconds, or any way he wanted to. I think in his race he went from the lead to the tail end two or three times before he finally got around to the final 220, and then he just out-strided them all, he just ran away from them. He was just a kid, he was a freshman. He was just beginning to reach his peak then, and he later went on to set records. I think he ran for four or five years after that.

Hodak: Would you talk about the 100-meter relay? There are a lot of different opinions as to why the runners on the relay team were changed.

Williams: Well, the facts are that the final team for the 400 meters was made up of Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, naturally, and then two other sprinters, [Frank] Wykoff and [Foy] Draper, both of them from Southern California. Well, Wykoff had already run in the Olympics, in the 100 meters; Draper was one of the alternates for the 100 meters, as was [Sam] Stoller and [Martin] Clickman. So, one way of doing it was to let those three guys, plus Jesse Owens or Ralph Metcalfe, run—and they

would have won anyway. And it would have meant that every man that went over there would have been in the Olympics and participated whether they won or not—which I thought was the object of the Olympics in the first place. Well, it turns out that the only two guys that didn't get to compete were Marty Clickman and Sam Stoller. And the fact that they were Jewish was incidental, but there was a lot of talk that they weren't allowed to run because it would have offended Hitler.

Hodak: And you don't think that was the issue?

Williams: Oh, of course not. It was a matter of politics, I think, more than anything else. But all we know are the facts. I felt, and Jimmy felt, that hey, we took four other quarter-milers that were not that much slower than we were, and if they played their cards right they could win the gold. It so happened that they got second. But at least every one of them got to compete, and that's the way we felt.

Hodak: You mean the coaches had tried to get you and Jimmy LuValle to run in the 4x400 relay?

Williams: Well, I guess they felt that we should have. But I just said, "I'm not gonna run." Jimmy said the same thing. In fact, we got together and said, "Let's let these guys run, or let's insist that they get to run." They did and they got second. And they might have won—they didn't lose by much—but at least they can say that they competed. And as far as I'm concerned, that's what the whole thing is about. Because I really don't think that they should take a lot of athletes that aren't going to compete. It's not the same as a football or baseball team where you have substitutes. In fact, it's not like anything else in the world. I don't think that they should say, well, you can go and we might find a spot for you, and we might not. I'm sure that still happens, and I don't think it should be that way. But that's the way it was, as I see it.

But it might be different in the book. The truth will never come out because some of the people aren't around anymore. But it's an example of how they can manipulate things if they want to. I don't think that's right.

Hodak: What about Jesse Owens? Do you remember any of his events particularly?

Williams Oh yeah. Well, I followed him closely because he had been a sort of a role model ever since I can remember. He was a terrific person and obviously a finely-tuned athlete. He wore his glory, I guess you might say, very gracefully. He wasn't cocky but he was confident. He was just the kind of guy that you would want to be like. In fact, if anything, he was probably too nice, in that he would be the last one off the track, signing autographs and this and that, just very obliging.

Hodak: You think he handled all the attention and publicity pretty well?

Williams Oh yeah. He did that real well, real well.

Hodak: I imagine that was awfully tough on him in one sense.

Williams That's right, and I kind of feel like he was somewhat exploited. By that I mean that he probably didn't get the overall recognition, for instance, as far as employment and things of that sort, that he deserved considering what he had done. But then that was just the way things were, I guess, in those days.

Hodak: We talked earlier of post-Olympic competition that you competed in, and there's an incident that involves Jesse Owens there. Do you want to talk about that?

Williams: (Laughter) Yeah, it was almost a catastrophe. They had made up the team to go to some of the Scandinavian countries. Jesse, obviously, was to be the star of the show. He got a call from Eddie Cantor to come back to the States as quick as he could. Eddie Cantor had lined up some nightclub appearances and public appearances, which were calculated to make him a lot of money. Well, he accepted that and he got on the first boat coming back to bring the rest of the team back. And we, of course, got on the plane and went up to Oslo, and I think Oslo was the first stop. We landed the plane and somebody came up to the plane, and said, "Welcome to Oslo. Where's Mr. Owens?" I said, "He ain't coming." He said, "What do you mean he ain't coming?" I said, "He ain't coming." He said, "Do you see that big sign up there? What does that say? It says 'Welcome Jesse Owens.' He's got to come." I said, "I'm sorry, but he ain't coming."

Hodak: He thought you were pulling his leg?

Williams: Right. So he gets on the airplane, he goes up in the cockpit, looks around, he goes back in the restroom, he looks under the seats, he looks in the baggage compartment. Then he looks at me and he says, "Ah, I know, you're just playing a joke. You're Jesse Owens." I said, "No I ain't." "Yes you are." "No I ain't." "Yes you are." So I said, "Okay, give me that autograph book." So I signed Jesse's name and walked away.

It's kind of sad in a way, because for that the AAU suspended Jesse's amateur standing, so he was no longer able to compete as an amateur. The tragedy of it is that he never really did make too much out of the fact that he'd won all these medals and things. Nobody would offer him the sort of thing that they should have, I think. He had jobs as public relations this, honorary this and that, but nothing with a real future to it. So I really felt that he somehow or another just got caught in a bad situation.

Hodak: Well, racing against greyhounds was not a very—

Williams: Yeah, he couldn't beat a greyhound, but he could beat a horse in a short race. But it was very demeaning to even ask him to do things like that. But he had to feed his family, and so he resorted to that. And I felt real bad about hearing about it. I never did see it.

Hodak: Tell me more about some of these post-Olympic meets you competed in, and how they went, what cities you visited.

Williams: Oh boy, let's see. I know we went to Stockholm, we went to Halsingborg, we went to Gothenburg, and some smaller places that I don't even remember. Then we went up to Helsinki, Finland, and by the way, that's where I met Paavo Nurmi. He had a clothing or haberdashery shop there. That was one of the high points of the trip. He didn't have too much to say, but he did speak English. I just wanted to shake his hand. I bought a necktie from him. I think I still have it.

Most of the meets, except for the big cities, were just exhibitions. In one case it was a lumber camp that had a track team. So we would run all kinds of odd events. I think I did the high jump and I ran the 100. In fact, that's when I got my injury, when I ran the 100, just for an exhibition. I didn't warm up enough and I got a hamstring injury, and that was the beginning of the end as far as my running was concerned. From then on, every time I'd run I'd be conscious of it, and it happened a couple more times. So I finally felt, well, maybe mother nature's trying to tell me something. So I'll get back to work on my studies, and let somebody else have a crack at it.

There was a real funny incident on our trip to Scandinavia. Ol' [Forrest] "Spec" Towns was along with us. Well, he ran the hurdles in Oslo and set a new world's record, some unbelievable time—13.7, I think. But we got someone to call

him on the phone to tell him the record didn't count because there were only nine hurdles on the track. Well, that fooled Spec—he sort of went into orbit. And the next day we told him it was a joke and he settled down. (laughter)

Hodak: Despite your injury, you did compete during your junior year at Cal?

Williams: Yeah, I competed, but it was off and on. I'd run a couple of races and then I'd hurt my leg. I'd run again and hurt my leg. And so it got to the point where it was kind of agonizing, because I couldn't do my best. I knew the harder I tried, the more likely I was to mess it up. It was truly agonizing. I understand nowadays that they have techniques and therapy whereby you can be running again in two weeks, but that wasn't available then. I can still feel scar tissue in my leg from it. Well, like I said, I had my share of it and I don't regret anything. In fact, it might have been good that I did get back to my studies, because I lost almost a year of school by going to the Olympics. I didn't get back from Europe until the school year was almost half over, so I sort of had to sit out that one semester.

Hodak: Was there any sort of ceremony that honored you in your hometown?

Williams: Oh yeah. I got the real key to the city and I got a ride in a big fire engine. I got a gold watch from the city, and a lot of honors and things. People wanted me to make speeches and things. I really felt proud then, because I had a chance to go back to my old schools that I'd been to, high schools and all, and see a lot of people. And of course they were proud of me. I cherish those moments.

Hodak: So following the Olympics, I imagine the Olympic Club wouldn't have offered you a membership, right? That was out of the

question.

Williams: Oh, no. They just borrowed the name Olympic because it sounded kind of neat. We used to call them the flying assholes. (laughter) The main perk that you got from them was the fact that you were representing a club. So you got your room and board and transportation, and the expenses were all paid for you.

Hodak: So in any summer meet you would have competed in you had to supply your own expenses, as you were competing unattached?

Williams: That's right; whereas with the club everything was done for you, and of course you could use the facilities there too. It was kind of a neat thing. I know a lot of fellows, they almost felt apologetic that they were there and I wasn't. But I said, I know it wasn't right, no biggie, it doesn't bother me a bit.

Hodak: So this injury effectively cut short your track career.

Williams: That's right.

Hodak: And you graduated in '39?

Williams: In '39, right. I graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering.

Hodak: What were your thoughts then in '39? What did you look to do? Were there many opportunities?

Williams: Nope, zero. In fact, when I went and signed up for engineering, my counselor said, "You're crazy. Why don't you be a preacher or a real estate man or something like that? You're not going to get any job as a engineer." I said, "Well, I want to study it, so just sign me up." Then at the end they arranged interviews with General Motors, Lockheed, and other

firms. And he did it, well, almost on purpose, just to show: "See what I told you." They said, "Well, you have a nice record. Don't call us, we'll call you." I knew it wasn't going to be, but I did it anyway.

Then I got interested in aviation while I was in college, and they had a civil pilot training program. So I signed up for that, and even then a couple of the guys said, "I don't think we can sign you up." So I went and saw my coach, and he rattled a few cages and I got signed up. There wasn't a law that said they couldn't do it, but these guys were taking the law into their own hands. They said, "Well, we don't think that the government wants to do this." But I got into the program. That was my senior year. Just about the time I graduated I got my pilot's license, and then I went to work. I couldn't get a job anyplace else, so I went to work for the fellow that ran the flying school and had the contract to teach flying. And I worked for him as a kind of "ramp rat"—gassing airplanes and washing windshields. In those days the little biplanes didn't have brakes or steering wheels, so you had to walk along the sides and hold the wings while they were taxiing—they called it wing-walking. I hung out at the airport and built my time up until I finally got my commercial license and instructor's rating. Then the next move was—what do you do with it? You couldn't get a salaried job at the airport; nobody would hire you. Even the guy that I worked for, who fronted me some of the money, said that he stood to lose his contract if he hired me to teach. So, what I did was become kind of a freelancer, and I had an instructor's rating which meant I could give instruction for two dollars an hour. Also, when people had to take a flight check they had to be recommended by an instructor. Well, I'd fly with them and give them some pointers and sign their logbook, and that way I could build my time up.

That's when I heard about Tuskegee Institute. So I wrote

down there. That was about the only place in the country where you could work in aviation, since it was a black school. I got a job down there, and I think we were getting 200 dollars a month, when everybody else was getting at least 100 or 500 dollars. The guy had a captive audience because we couldn't work anyplace else, and he said if we made any noise about quitting he'd notify our draft board in 24 hours. So, he had us by the ying yang. (laughter)

Hodak: Now some people might not be aware of the Tuskegee airmen and their accomplishments.

Williams: Well, what it was, it was an experiment. Actually, you might say Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was probably the main one behind it, although there were a lot of people interested in it. And, of course, there was a lot of opposition, especially in the military, because for some reason they had a bunch of "tests" that they'd given during World War I, which supposedly showed that black people were inferior mentally, they had no courage, and weren't good enough to fly airplanes. They just thought everybody was "Steppin Fetchit" or something like that, so they said the jump from the plow to the plane is too much for these niggers. (laughter) So, anyway, Mrs. Roosevelt came down to Tuskegee and actually the chief pilot, a friend of mine, took her for a ride. Well, it started off as a civilian program, like the one that I went through at Berkeley, and then they finally persuaded the War Department at that time to set up a, no pun intended, pilot program for black pilots. The first five of them, I think, were handpicked. One of them was B.O. Davis, Jr. who later became a general. He was one of the first black West Point graduates, if not the first. Then they brought the planes in; they had about five airplanes and an old dirty field. Well, shortly after the thing got going was when war was declared in 1941. So then they started building stuff in earnest. They built the runways, they built barracks, and then the classes started getting bigger and bigger. I started

off instructing in the civilian program and then I ended up instructing in what they call the army primary program. I did that until I was called up to go to UCLA to go to meteorology school. I'd signed up for a reservist, and they went through my records and saw that I had this engineering training so they said we'll send you to meteorology school now. Then I went there and that's how I got my commission.

Hodak: So you studied for a degree in meteorology?

Williams: I don't have what you would call a master's degree. It was a two-year course, but it amounted to a degree. We got the same thing in two years that you would get in four years.

Hodak: This was a program that was run at five other schools?

Williams: Yeah, five other schools: UCLA, CalTech, MIT, the University of Chicago, and I think Penn State. It was all run by civilians, but we were aviation cadets. We graduated and, naturally, I was sent back to Tuskegee where I belonged according to them. I was a weatherman for awhile, and then they found out I knew how to fly. (The guys all knew that.) So they were setting up an instructors school for some of the civilians. I was eligible, so I went to the instructors school and became a basic flight instructor. You had primary, basic, and advanced. I taught basic, then I taught basic instrument flying, and I then taught advanced instrument flying, and did weather duty on the side. Sometimes I'd fly in the morning and do weather maps in the afternoon, or vice versa. Then I taught ground school. I think something happened to the guy who taught the weather in the ground school, so I did that in my spare time. Of course, you got the same money no matter what you did.

Hodak: So what did you do following the war?

Williams: Well, they closed Tuskegee down eventually. In fact, I was there when they closed the base. Some of the guys went to Godman Field down in Kentucky. I went to Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio, and helped set up the weather station there. I was there for almost two years, and then I signed up for the Air Force Institute of Technology over at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. I was there for two years in aeronautical engineering.

Hodak: That's in Dayton?

Williams: In Dayton, Ohio, right. It's the headquarters of the Air Materiel Command, and also the headquarters of all flight-tests. I put in two years there. We got another kind of degree there. It wasn't the same as a normal degree because, again, it was junior, senior and some graduate level studies. By that time, that was 1950, the Korean War had just broken out. So I got sent overseas to Japan, Korea, Okinawa, and places like that for a year and a half. Then I could either rotate back to the States or I could stay over there and have my wife come over, which I did. And we lived in Japan for almost two years.

Hodak: Following the Korean War you stayed with the Air Force?

Williams: Oh yeah. By that time I had about eleven years of service. My brother had gotten out and he wasn't doing anything. I was a captain on flying pay, so he said, "Hell, stay in there." So I said, "Right on."

Hodak: Was the Air Force formally desegregated?

Williams: When I left Lockbourne it hadn't been, but that year is when Truman came out and said, knock it off boys, enough's enough. So I was sent over to Wright-Patterson and from then on there wasn't any segregation. You were just another guy, another

guy on the roster.

Hodak: So how long did you stay with the Air Force?

Williams: I stayed for 22 years. When I came back from Japan I had a weather detachment up in New York at the Air Defense Command 26th Air Division. I was a staff weather officer there and I had about 20 guys in my detachment. Then I went to Alaska, and I had a real big detachment. I had about 50 people working for me. I was a major then. I had captains, lieutenants, warrant officers, and a whole lot of sergeants and all. That was at Elmendorf Air Force Base. Then after that, I came back to March Air Force Base in Riverside and that's where I retired in 1964. I was working in the headquarters and command post of the 15th Air Force Division. That's when I kissed them goodbye and I said I'll try something else now. Then I went back to school and got a teacher's credential and started teaching. I taught for a year down there and decided that I'd like to come back to the old home area. So, I finagled a job up here, and here I am.

Hodak: Tell me a bit about your teaching up here?

Williams: Well, I taught at Sir Francis Drake High School, which is an average-sized high school, nothing different from any other school. The kids were real nice and they had a lot of school spirit. It's in San Anselmo which is sort of in the middle of Marin County. It's a good cross-section of the county. There was some affluence and some poverty, and a good ethnic mix. It was a nice place to work because it was just small enough to where you knew everybody. And you got to know the people in the community real well, so you felt like you were part of something.

Hodak: Where you engaged in coaching track?

Williams: Yeah, well, I coached a little. I helped them out because they found out about my track running. I just helped them a little bit. I don't think I made any champions or anything, although we did pretty well. Considering our size, we'd always get our share. I think we did win the county meet once, maybe it was the B division that we won. The girls did good. In fact, they have a very good program down there now. I occasionally will go out and talk to the kids. They get me to speak at some of their meetings and all, show my race on the film and whatnot. Then, of all things, I coached golf for one year. (laughter) I even won the coaches' tournament, which was a laugher. But I wasn't serious about the sports because my main concern was teaching mathematics and later on computer science. I was just interested in it and I had some ideas on how to get the job done. I worked quite a bit with the less-endowed kids, or in some cases, kids who were handicapped or slow learners. I found that all of them have something to offer if you just take the patience to work with them and try to see just what they have to work with, and then you see what you can add to it. I really enjoyed that and it's a really good feeling to see success; not only to see them succeed, but to see them recognize the benefit of success. It's sort of, well, I guess they call it the Hawthorne effect, where doing good in one area makes them do better in other areas—and I've seen a lot of that.

I guess I'd still be there except that I ran across this friend of mine that has these airplanes up in Santa Rosa. We got to talking and he said, "You've been down there long enough. Why don't you come up here and start flying again?" Well, I thought about it and thought about it. I could see that with what I was doing in school I, more or less, had hit a plateau. I wasn't bitter at all, but I kind of felt like things weren't turning out the way that I'd hoped they would as far as the education system. To put it very simply, I felt that if I have to do some of these things that they're asking me to do, I

probably won't be helping the kids. And if I can't help them I don't want to hurt them. Plus the fact that I got back to flying and doing things that I like to do, and I got my family interested in flying also. So, I just feel good about it.

Hodak: Now talk about Fred Walts a bit, your partner here in Santa Rosa.

Williams: Well, I'm the kid around here. I'm 73 and he's 75. Fred's been flying since 1931 or '35. He's owned about 50 airplanes. He's done everything. He's chased wild horses up in Nevada, he's towed banners—which we're doing now—he's done all sorts of charter work. He ran about three or four flying schools before he signed on with Pan Am back around 1942 or so. He stayed with them for 30 years and flew just about every airplane they had.

Hodak: And you share a common background in track and field?

Williams: That's right. Well, that's the part I neglected to mention. For his size you'd never believe that he was the state champion of Nevada in 1931, I guess. He won the 100, 220, 440, and the relay. He went to the University of San Francisco and was a member of a world record medley relay team. He competed for the Olympic Club and had a lot of success. He just barely missed out qualifying for the '32 Olympics. There was a foul-up in the lane assignments and he had to run, well, quite a few of them had to run about ten yards further than everybody else. So he didn't make it in the trials.

Fred is well known throughout the state. He was a good friend of Senator Pat McCarran, who they named the field after in Las Vegas. And he's also a good friend of Alan Cranston. Alan came to see us here about a month ago.

Hodak: Tell me a bit about your family. I know you met your wife in

the early '40s.

Williams: I met Vesta down at Tuskegee and took her for an airplane ride. And, I don't know . . . I guess there was something about me that she liked, and there was a lot about her that I liked. So we just went ahead and talked it over, and about two or three months later we were married.

Hodak: Your wife is from Illinois?

Williams: Yes, she's from Cairo, Illinois. She graduated from the University of Illinois. We have two children: Archie Jr. is about 32 and Carlos is 24. Archie Jr. is a very talented musician. He's a musical director for Maria Muldaur. In fact, right now they're in Atlantic City. He's been there for about a month in the main room of the Sands Hotel. He's going up to New York and he'll be home in July and then they're going to go through Canada, come back here, and then they're probably going to go to Hawaii. So he's on the road all the time. Carlos, my younger son, has just finished the hotel and restaurant management program at San Francisco State and he's working now as a waiter, marking time until the big opportunity comes along.

Hodak: Did either of your sons take up athletics, following in your footsteps?

Williams: Well, Archie didn't do it. Carlos actually tried a little bit of everything. He tried Pop Warner football, he took up swimming, and he won the free-throw competition for Marin County. Then he went to Sacramento and got beaten by a girl, so he's not too proud of that. But he did win a trophy and a big dinner at the Elks Club in San Rafael. All of them are interested in flying. My wife is learning—in fact, I'm teaching them all. We have a couple of airplanes that we make good use of except, like today, when it rains. But it's raring to go.

Hodak: You've lived in Fairfax—

Williams: Yes, in Marin County for the last 22 years. I had 22 years in the Air Force, 22 years of teaching, so the next 22 are mine to do what I please.

Hodak: How do you maintain your health and youthfulness? What thoughts do you have on that?

Williams: Nothing. You just don't think about being old. Well, you've got to want to do it. You want to push yourself to do things that won't promote that. Like, I drive 50 miles up here and back every day, but I don't mind it because I'm going to do something that I like to do. Then, having an airplane, I can always just take off. We might fly down to Fresno, or maybe up to Redding to see my brother Clifford, or over to Reno, depending on the weather. It's just a neat way to travel.

Hodak: In summary, what things do you think of when you look at the Olympics today?

Williams: Oh yeah, it's a whole new ballgame. And I'm not saying that in a derogatory way. But I do think that it's become such a spectacle that that part of it seems to be emphasized to the detriment of the athletes. And, it seems like, well, I just get the feeling that it's kind of like the eliminating that takes place, say, for the Kentucky Derby or the Indy 500 or something like that, where only the good need apply, you might say. I don't even know how they go about selecting who is going to be on the team. In our case, everybody knew what it was; you'd have regional trials and then the sectional-regional tryouts, and then they had the final tryouts. You had to be there and you had to do it. You knew that, so you didn't try to be cute and try to just barely make it; you tried to just do the best you could.

Now, I understand that some of the guys aren't sure if they're going to be on the team until maybe a very short time before it happens. In other words, they probably have the team assembled, or at least tentatively selected, already. And when you think, there are about twice as many people in this country as there were 50 years ago. So there's more competition, and there's better support. Not only that, but in our case we were all college kids. The average age was probably 22, 23—early 20s. Now most of the good athletes are in their late 20s or early 30s, and I guess it takes that long for them to reach their peak. Most of them have dedicated their life to it, whereas in our case, most of us were just college boys.

Hodak: Barring your hamstring injury, you may have reached a different peak in your competition in college.

Williams: Right. But that wasn't a goal really; whereas with these guys, it's almost like a profession. Edwin Moses and people like that who can make all this money. And if that, as it is in some cases, is the only thing that they're really good at, they should exploit it.

Hodak: Do you have any advice to offer or further thoughts on the Olympics?

Williams: Well, I don't think it's something that can be turned around. It's not going to change, I don't think, being what it is, and with all the money involved and all the preparation. It's grown too big, I'll put it that way—way too big. But it's inevitable. For instance, I'd say they probably have twice as many different events. Track and field hasn't changed that much... well, it has too. When we competed there were only about five or six female events. Now the girls are doing everything except pole vaulting and hammer throwing, and who knows. And in the Winter Olympics they have things that I've never heard of; this luge, whatever they call it.

There's one event that I really can't, in good conscience, associate with the Olympics, and that's that water ballet stuff. That stuff belongs at Disneyland. It's beautiful! Well, I'll put it this way. Anybody that finishes an Olympic event and is not dead on their ass hasn't gotten the message. You're supposed to bust your gut. That's why I say some of these events where you are judged on class and style—that's beauty, that's pageantry. But that's not athletics. And I think that the more of that that they put in there, the more it will dilute what the Olympics stand for. I'm afraid that they're getting further and further away from that, without even realizing it. I don't know what to do about it.

And I certainly didn't care for the boycott in 1980. That was about human rights, wasn't it? Well, you look at John Carlos and Tommie Smith in 1968. They were talking about human rights in this country, and look how they were treated. I think we have a lot of things to look at right in our country. People have asked me, they say, "What did you think of those 'traitors' on the victory stand in 1968?" Well, I know what they want me to say. . . but I believe it took a lot of courage for those guys to do what they did. They deserve respect for that, and I feel very strongly about it. So the boycott thing is kind of crazy to me. It doesn't help matters at all, for any country.

Well, when you look back on it and you say, well, gee-whiz, I'm an old, worn-out has-been. Some guy once told me, "Well, it's a lot better to be a has-been than a never-was." (laughter) But this is kind of nice for me in a way because it's jogged my memory to the extent that I've had to think of different things that happened, it's kind of nice to do that. Every now and then I get my old scrapbook out and go through it. Something will come up that I hadn't thought of. I don't know how much this will help anybody else, but I feel like it's worth passing on anything that I might have observed. I'm

sure that everybody that's involved in sports will have moments like that, and those who do will know what I'm talking about when that happens. So, all I can say is I've really enjoyed it and I hope you'll come back sometime. And I'll think of some more lies to tell you. (laughter)

Hodak: You can count on me returning. I thank you for allowing me to come up and talk with you and interview you, as does the Amateur Athletic Foundation. Thanks Archie, it's nice to have met you and Fred. You've been very gracious hosts.