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**Program of Oral History**

GENERAL ELLIS WILLIAMSON

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL ELLIS WILLIAMSON

INTERVIEWER: WILLIAM BURR

WASHINGTON, D.C.: FEBRUARY 10, MARCH 11,  
AND APRIL 13, 1988

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IRANIAN - AMERICAN RELATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of  
Major General Ellis Williamson  
U.S. Army (Retired)

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1990

## PREFACE

The following oral history memoir is the result of three tape-recorded interview sessions with Major General Ellis Williamson on February 10, March 11, and April 13, 1988. The interviews was conducted by William Burr in Arlington, Virginia.

This interview is one of a series on Iranian-American relations in the post-World War II era which were conducted as part of a joint project between the Oral History of Iran Archives of the Foundation for Iranian Studies and the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Similar projects have been undertaken in England and France.

General Williamson has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, however, that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by William Burr with Major General Ellis Williamson in Washington, D.C. in February 10, March 11, and April 13, 1988.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

General Ellis Williamson was the head of the U.S. Military Advisory Mission in Iran in the 1970s. During his service in Iran, he supervised the U.S. arms sales program to Iran, and oversaw relations between Iranian armed forces and the U.S. military. His recollections shed much light on the working of the Iranian armed forces, the nature of U.S.-Iranian relations, the pattern of U.S. arms sales to Iran and the decisions that were influential therein, as well as the policies and leadership style of various Iranian and American political and military personages.

CONTENTS OF INTERVIEW WITH MAJOR GENERAL ELLIS WILLIAMSON

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
General Williamson's opening statement concerning his personal experiences and observations on Iran:	1-18
General Williamson's description of his early background in North Carolina; his education and military career including his accomplishments in World War II, Korea and Vietnam:	18-29
General Williamson's duties at International Security Affairs; the Iranian armed forces; U.S. military aid for Iran:	29-42
General Williamson's military assignments in Colorado, Germany, War College; his years in the Pentagon during the McNamara days:	42-49
War in Vietnam; assignment to Armish-MAAG in Iran; U.S. ambassadors in Iran; audiences with the Shah:	49-62
Duties as chief of Armish-MAAG, preparation for assignment in Iran; impressions of the Shah:	62-68
Iran's strategic importance to the U.S.; United States' listening post to monitor the Soviet Union; Iran's occupation of Tunbs Islands; Channels of communication between the Shah and the U.S.; Nixon's approach toward Iran in early 70s:	68-75
President Nixon's visit to Iran in 1972; Nixon's pledge to provide Iran with every U.S. weapon short of nuclear; element in the U.S. opposing the carte blanche; Shah's military strategy in defending Iran in the event of invasion:	75-87
General Williamson's personal anecdotes; U.S. arms sales to Iran; Iran's military infrastructure; Kurdish insurgency:	76-100
Pentagon officials' interest in Iran; State Department and congressional visits to Iran:	100-104
General Williamson's working relationship with U.S. ambassadors in Tehran during his mission in Iran:	104-113
General Williamson's working relationship with the CIA; traveling in Iran; social, economic and conditions in Iran; political stability; Shah's popularity and his opponents:	113-124
Armish-MAAG work in Iran; U.S training of the Iranian military; Persian speaking U.S. officers:	124-135

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
General Williamson's impressions of the top Iranian military officers; military leaders' loyalty to the Shah:	135-144
Shah's stabilizing role in the Persian Gulf; Iran's military operation in Oman and the Tunbs Island, Iran's military buildup and regional arms race:	144-152
Armish-MAAG working relationship with arms manufacturers in the U.S.; Iran's major arms procurement: F-14, F-15: 152-171	
Commercial considerations in arm sales to Iran; Shah's illness; the soaring oil prices in early 70s; Shah's oil policy:	172-182
Iran's military base in Chah Bahar:	182-186
Arguments about the nature of U.S-Iranian relationship; General Williamson's concluding comment:	187-189



CORRECTIONS

- P. 7 "Shattl-al-arab" should be "Shatt-al Arab"  
p. 62 "Assadolah" should be "Asadollah Alam"  
p. 73 " Kasuin" should be "Qazvin"  
p. 94 "Minbashin" should be "Minbashian"  
p. 96 "Pekan" Should be "Peykan"  
p. 177 "Williamson" should be "Q"

DDR

Interviewee: General Ellis Williamson, USA (Ret.)      Session #1

Interviewer: William Burr      Arlington, Virginia

February 10, 1988

Q: The following interview with General Ellis Williamson by William Burr took place in Arlington, Virginia, on February 10, 1988. The interview is part of a joint project by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office and the Foundation for Iranian Studies.

General Williamson, would you like to make a statement before we start out with the questions on the issues of U.S.-Iran relations?

Williamson: All right. Major General Ellis Williamson, U.S. Army (Retired), 10th of February 1988.

When I was first assigned, or learned that I was being assigned to Iran, I went there with a chip on my shoulder for probably three different reasons. First of all, I knew very, very little about Iran. I realized that I was being sent over there as the chief of the military mission and personal advisor to the Shah of Iran with relatively little background as far as the culture and the people was concerned.

The second reason was the fact that I already had been given indication that I was being given a three-star assignment, and that was being changed because of a special meeting between the Chief of Staff and the Shah of Iran, and they had decided that they wanted a different type Chief of Mission than the previous one. I was flattered by being told that, well, they'd just put my promotion off for a couple of years, but this was a fabulously wonderful opportunity for me and for the service. The third reason, I think, was the fact that in my initial briefings at every turn, whether it was at the Department of Defense, Department of State, CIA, everywhere I went for my preparations, I was told what a brilliant man the Shah of Iran was, just the smartest man that ever lived. My comment was, "Well, certainly he looks smart. He's been King for over 30 years. And if someone brings up a subject he's not familiar with, all he has to do is change the subject and talk on something else." I said, "A man in that position should look smart to anyone." So I went over there somewhat opposed to going, and not thinking as positively as I should.

After being over there just a very short time, and half a dozen or so private meetings with the Shah, I became a total convert. I became thoroughly convinced that he was probably one of the most brilliant men I had ever met. He had as near total recall as any person I know of. He could understand the essence,

the meaning, of a group of facts very quickly, and on top of that, he was an extremely nice person. It absolutely amazed me that anyone could have been king for that long and still maintain the ability to listen. He was truly interested in learning new things or understanding the reasoning behind incidents. So I, as mentioned, became a convert, having been pretty sore about the whole thing initially.

But to understand the way the Persians' psyche works, we need to understand that the Iranians are thinking, living, completely immersed with their heritage. They don't think Iran; they think the Persian Empire. As they visualize the Persian Empire, they swing around the Mediterranean all the way to include Ethiopia, they look north up both sides of the Caspian Sea at least a couple hundred miles into what is now called Russia. They think much larger than just Iran, and they think of their culture as having been in the past well ahead of the rest of the world in setting the pace for the rest of the world.

They pride themselves, and they originated the idea of human rights. They claim that the Persian Empire had no slaves. They claim that they were benevolent leaders to such an extent that they were really loved by their subordinates or peasants. So they're living in the past. Now, the years since, 2,500 years of a continuous monarchy as they visualize themselves, they realize that it included much loss of territory, many invasions, many

encroachments on their culture, many forced beliefs, but they still think of themselves very similar to the Greeks, that their culture is so strong that it has survived adversity, and they have no doubt in their minds but what the Persian culture will survive and will rise and will dominate in time. Until you realize that they expect, they fully expect the Persian culture to come up over and above everything else on earth, that's what they believe, and if you don't accept the fact that they believe it, then you don't understand them.

They have a lot of "quirks" in their personalities. They believe in their religion. I'm sorry to use the word "quirk." That's not quite correct. They do believe in their religion, and they believe in it literally, to such an extent that they are looking forward to the opportunity of dying for their country. They revere their so-called martyrs, those who have died in the service of their religion and in the service of their country. They revere those martyrs over and above everything. The women are pleased when they hear that their sons have died for the service. Until you accept that, you don't understand.

There are a lot of little things that we can talk about later, but the Iranians, as they look at themselves, beginning about 1955, '56, '57, '58, 1960, along in there, they went through a transition, and then under the Shah, they started what they called the White Revolution. The White Revolution was not a

blood-letting battle. There were almost no deaths, tragedies, physical conflicts and things of that sort. There were some tribal banging back and forth. But they thought of themselves as bringing their country back into the, as they called it, community of advanced nations. They thought in terms of coming back into this community by a parallel improvement in twelve different fields, and surprisingly enough, military was not one of them. They were looking to education, to sanitation, to medicine, to industrialization, things of that sort.

The first question the Westerner has: "If the military was not one of them, what caused this fantastic military buildup?" The military buildup in the mind--and I discussed this personally with the Shah time and time again, and with many of his assistants. The military, in their mind, was 100 percent designed to permit the twelve elements of the White Revolution to succeed without outside interference. That's the way they looked at it.

You may ask, "Why did they think they needed it?" Historically, again, as I mentioned, the empire was diminished by losing territory. One of the most recent ones was when the Russian empire decided to come down both flanks of the Caspian Sea. The great port of Baku used to be in Iran; it's now one of the large Russian ports. The Russians, by military power, just

plain moved down and took it away from them. The Iranians couldn't resist.

World War I came along. The Iranians were very, very upset about outside dominance, so they started trying to do everything they could. The British, as you know, at the turn of the century had gone in and developed the oil. The British had really come in and just about overwhelmed that country and got control of their rail lines, their communication, the oil system and everything else. To a great extent, the Germans came in, the Americans some, the French some, and the Italians some. So they were very, very upset about foreign intervention--to such an extent that they started passing laws against foreigners, pushing out foreign investments. Of course, the foreign countries didn't want to give up their assets, so it developed into a general problem.

I believe it was 1923, along in there, they signed a pact with Russia, a pact that, in effect, said that Russia could participate in many things if Russia would help Iran keep European nations from dominating Iran. Then signing the treaty, there was a Chapter Six. I may have to do some studying on this to be sure I have my numbers right. I think I'm correct. There was one chapter in there, a phrase that said if a foreign country takes over undue influence in Iran, that's number one. Number two, if Iranians try to expel the foreign country and fails, and

if the Iranians requested, then Russia will come in with military force and expel the country. Four elements of that agreement.

The Iranians, in the late sixties, early, mid-, and late seventies, said that Chapter Six was not signed at the time the treaty was signed, that that Chapter Six was added after the treaty was signed, it was added in Moscow, and their ambassador was forced to sign it under duress. Now, whether that's right or not, I don't know, but that's the Iranian idea, and I have heard that personally, verbally, from the Prime Minister, from the Minister of War, and from the Commander of the Imperial Iranian Military Staff. I never discussed it personally with the Shah, but I heard it from all three of those, and that's what they thought was right.

After World War II, the Russians, as you recall, came in from the north, and the British came in through the Persian Gulf and blasted the Iranian Navy out of existence, and in nothing flat, the British and the Americans and the Russians were using the land mass of Iran as a supply base for the element of the World War II activities coming from the east. So there were many Americans, Britishers, and Russians in Iran at the end of World War II.

A decision was made that our forces would withdraw and leave Iran to their own assets, and the Americans and the British got out, and the Russians didn't want to leave the Azerbaijan area,



the area near the Caspian Sea. As you know, in 1947, our President, President Truman, in effect said, "We've got the atomic bomb and you don't have it, now get the hell out." That's the only way that the Russians were forced out of Iran at the end of World War II. Iranians absolutely revered President Truman for taking that stance, and they have always respected, for years, respected the Americans greatly. But that really put the cap on it. The Iranians, the leadership and the masses, believe what they're told. The leadership thought that the Americans were gods almost. They believed in us to a fault. The Americans have sent doctors, educators, all kinds of assistance over there, and the Iranians were very, very appreciative of that.

The Russians, since 1947, have several times made rumblings and indicated they were going to invoke Chapter Six of the 1923 agreement, and it just scared the hell out of Iran. Iranians do not like the Russians; they're scared to death of them. I think that's what we've seen.

When the recent revolution started, it came as a surprise to a lot of people, but not to the Shah. The Shah was expecting it. The Shah had no idea at all that he'd lose. He was thoroughly convinced that he could prevail. But I'd say on at least eight, ten, maybe 15 times I discussed with him, or he discussed with me, his thoughts that as you bring a nation along this rapidly, you absolutely must educate the masses. You must give the masses

a voice. You must let the masses express themselves and make mistakes. Against a lot of advice, he permitted many, many student activities and things of that sort come about--what many nations would call dissident activities--because he thought it was healthy. He thought that people would learn responsibility by making mistakes. He's been criticized quite a bit by some people because he would not turn his own weapons on his own people, and I think when you really look into it, you'll find that, by and large, he did not. There was some of it, but by and large not. He could have put down that revolution with military strength.

What made the revolution succeed? Again, I'm telling you just one guy's idea, and it is very narrow in its view, so narrow that I have a tendency to magnify it too much. So take it for what it's worth. In my judgment, the Shah and his administration fell because of its conflict with religion. Its conflict with religion was created, at least 85%, through one major point, and that is land reform.

Many books have been written on land reform. I think history will show that Iran is certainly one of the few--maybe the only--nation which you can name where land reform was actually put into effect. He created, in a period of ten years, literally millions of new landowners. He said that no one individual could own more than, I believe, 160 hectares. But in

saying that, he broke into the extremely wealthy. Because over there, the owning of property is considerably different from what it is over here. You own a piece of land, that's your land, you can farm it, you can put a house on it, do what you want to with it pretty well. Over there, in addition to owning the land, an individual would own an entire community, which included not just the land, but all of the buildings, all of the public buildings, the churches, the schools, the factories, and everything, and the landowner told all of the people--peasants as we call them--what to plant, when to plant, when to harvest, where to sell. He took all the income and then he parceled out what he felt was appropriate to give to the peasants. So the land ownership over there had a completely different or magnified connotation from what it has over here.

Now, why did that hit such a nerve? Over there, the church is organized, very similar to the way the Catholic Church is worldwide. It owns a lot of revenue-producing property. When the Shah started breaking up these great landholdings, he nipped at the very nerve center of a lot of the religious leaders, and they started telling the relatively unsophisticated people, "The Shah is against our religion. He is destroying our religion." And the people are so religious, they believed it. Sure, a lot of them owned new land. A lot of them who had never dreamed of owning land before now were landowners. But to challenge their

religion was to hit at the very core. In my judgment, that was the sparkplug that pitched off the revolution. Then there was a whale of a lot of emotional organization and so forth. But in my judgment, the land reform was the key point that broke the revolution into the open and started the snowball.

I could talk for another two hours, but I think I've given you enough of the background and my personal feelings, where I'm coming from.

One thing I do want to say, though, to get back to the military. What did the Shah want to do with the military? He said this time and time again, and it turned out he was wrong: "If there is a war between neighboring nations, among neighboring nations,"--relatively small regional wars is what he was talking about--"the Great Powers will step in and stop it." And in that part, he was wrong. We haven't stopped it, the Iran-Iraqi War. But he said, "If, and I'm not looking for a fight, I don't want to fight, but if I have to fight Iraq, Pakistan, or Afghanistan,"--and I'll tell you why he distrusted them a little bit later--he said, "if I have to fight them, and the Great Powers step in to stop it, I want to be very sure the cease-fire line is not in my territory. I want to be prepared to absolutely know that it will be a break-even effect. I don't mean any of their territory. I don't want any of that territory. But I

absolutely refuse to surrender any of my territory to a neighboring country." That was number one.

Number two, "If Russia decides to come in under the pretext of the 1923 treaty or anything of that sort, if Russia decides to come in and take part of my territory--for 300 years, Russia has been looking for that warm-water port, right down through the western edge of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, they can come right to the open sea of the Indian Ocean. If Russia decides to do that, I want to ensure that I have the ability to delay them long enough for a scorched-earth policy and prevent them from getting anything of value. That we will do and are prepared."

That message went out to his armed forces throughout the south. "We will not lose to a neighboring country, and we will not let the Russians have anything." People called him a warmonger building up the big military regime, but that was his reasoning.

He did not, I can absolutely guarantee you this, he did not use his military for internal security. I know that, because I was stationed in Tehran, I had four airplanes in my command, I am a pilot myself. I flew my own airplane. I made two trips a week outside of Tehran, usually staying overnight each time. So I went to dozens, actually hundreds, of different towns in Iran. I went all over that country. I saw that country probably better than anyone who is alive today. I went all over that country. I

had a plane with a special system on that could land just anywhere I wanted. I could land on the highways or anything. The Shah gave me complete carte blanche. Nobody could ask me why I wanted to go, nobody would tell me not to go. I went completely unarmed for two years in every back-wood, big city, little village, tribal village, mountains. I went all over the country. I very frequently took my wife with me, completely unarmed. I saw no indication of people being beaten down, so he did not use his military as an internal security force.

Why was he frightened or concerned that a neighboring nation might be snipping at him? Ninety years ago, about then, a British cartographer drew the boundaries between Iraq and Iran in a stupid sort of way. International boundaries all over the world respect natural barriers. If it is a river, the boundary goes down the middle of the river, and each side is permitted the use of the river. Some British cartographer, drawing a map, drew the line down the Iranian side of the river. Why is that important? The major sea ports of Iraq and Iran have to use that river just to get there.

Q: Shattl-al-arab.

Williamson: Shattl-al-arab. So you have to go up that river to get to the major port of each of the countries. As you go on up,

the river gets rather small, and the mountains and trees and forest quite thick. And the guy just drew it with no natural line, which nobody gave a damn about for 50 years. But then when they started discovering oil up in there--I think Iran was drilling for oil. Iraq may have done some, too. But every time either nation would drill a hole in the ground, if they found oil, both nations claimed that the boundary was over on this side or that side. So that created a fight, a fuss, a continuous fuss between Iran and Iraq.

Then to make the matters worse, there's the Kurdish tribe up there that is in northwest Iran and northeast Iraq. The Kurds are across the borders of Turkey, and the Kurds are an independent bunch of devils that don't give a hoot about anybody. So anytime you want to get a fight, all you've got to do is go punch your neighbor and then go fight him. So there was a constant stir on the border. So Iran and Iraq have been at it psychologically for 40 years, I guess, anyway, a long, long time.

What about the other side? The Communist world, ever since the Communists took over in Russia, have been publishing papers and pamphlets about the nation of Baluchistan. Baluchis are, again, one of those tribes that is on the border. Baluchis live in eastern Iran and western Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Communist world had been planning to see that the Beluchis ought

to set up their own nation. Of course, that meant if there was a nation set up, and if the Soviets were influential among them, that would give Soviets their opening to the Indian Ocean. So the Shah was fearful that Russia would be successful in stirring up strife with Pakistan or Afghanistan. So that was his thought that, "I may sometime have to fight."

So his armed forces, as far as he was concerned--he did use his armed forces for one other purpose. Call it an instrument of social reform, call it an instrument of industrial development, call it an instrument of economic resources. He used his armed forces school system for educating one hell of a lot of people. He had a draft system; everybody owed the country so much service. The service could be rendered in many different ways, be rendered through the military, be rendered through the medical end, or it could be rendered through what they called the sanitary corps, or the literacy corps, which was something you really want to study.

The literacy corps was 120,000 strong of teachers. He would go out to these people from the tribes, who would be brought in to high schools, and when they finished high school, the time for their national service, they could give their national service by going back to teach, usually in their own tribe. So they would go to a pedagogy course set up for about six months, and then go back and teach for 18 months. They did that a lot.



Then in the military side, he took these high school graduates. Gosh, he trained thousands of automobile mechanics, radio technicians, all kinds of working-level skills. The way he worked his literacy corps and his military together is a person's pay was devised or graduated on two bases. One was what kind of skills did you have. Are you a mechanical engineer? Do you know how to repair an automobile engine, for instance? If you knew the basics of that, okay, you had a job doing this. But if you had a tenth grade education, your pay was here. If you had a twelfth grade education, your pay was increased. Doing the same job, but with a better education. So that encouraged education and marketable skills in that way. So he did use the armed forces to some extent in that way, but not for what we normally call internal security.

Have I talked enough now? I've already talked longer than I planned to.

Q: A very interesting statement--it raised questions which we can talk about as we go along.

Williamson: I feel that I was so close to these people. I had 40 years in the military service. I've been in 71 different countries. I've lived in a few of them long enough to learn the people, appreciate their culture, and I think the Iranian people,

although many of them are completely what we call unsophisticated, the Iranians are very possibly the nicest people worldwide. They're nice people.

The only trouble is the masses are unsophisticated, and then they have a characteristic that is true to some extent in Japan and Korea, basically they crave excitement. They literally crave excitement. And if something exciting is going on, they've just got to get in with it. They've got to be part of it. Right or wrong doesn't matter if it's exciting. They've often been described as a Cinderella mentality, just take life as it comes. Poor little Cinderella sits by the hearth, she's in the ashes, and she's just not doing much at all, but if all of a sudden there's a possibility that that glass slipper might fit, here they go! They're pitched off, they're excited! And it's dangerous. It's extremely dangerous, because so many of them are so unsophisticated that they will believe anything that a stranger tells them. The last story they hear is true in their minds. I hate to call them children, but many of them are. When I say that, I am excluding the top five or six percent. The top five or six percent of Iranians are extremely well educated, brilliant, they're cultured. You would be entirely happy to have them in your home, in your church, in your university. The top few percent of Iranians are wonderful, wonderful people.

Now I've talked to you almost an hour here with an opening statement. (Laughs) Almost an hour!

Q: That was a very interesting statement, which I think raises more questions that we can deal with as we go along. I thought maybe before we discussed your experience in Iran in detail, it might be good to ask about your background, so we could learn about the kind of experiences you brought with you to Iran when you were stationed there in '71 through '73. Is that procedure okay with you?

Williamson: Sure.

Q: Where were you born and raised?

Williamson: Born in the little town of Raeford, North Carolina. When I was one year old, my parents moved to Raleigh, which was the capital city. I was number six of seven children. My father was usually a barber, with a tenth grade education, but was very well self-educated--to such an extent that he spent 13 years as Assistant Secretary of Education in the state of North Carolina. So he was a very well-educated man, but not from a formal background. My mother had a college degree, taught at a university for a while. Both of them were sort of on the

academic line. My parents' total objective was that all seven of their children would have college degrees. We all made it.

Q: Where did you yourself receive your education?

Williamson: In addition to wanting us all to have college degrees, my father had one of these southern working-class ideas that a girl should get a college degree, have a college degree, and her parents should pay for it. No question. A boy should have a degree, and he should earn it. My father believed 100 percent that the value of earning your way through college was just as important as the knowledge you learned in the classroom. So out of five sons, he never gave a one of us the first dollar, as far as education was concerned. But my oldest brother was an electrical engineer and went on to be vice president of Allis-Chalmers. My second brother was a mechanical engineer, was quite successful with Gulf Oil. My third brother was a mechanical engineer, and he went on to be vice president of Bethlehem Steel. My youngest brother is a medical doctor in a very successful practice. My two oldest sisters were graduated from college.

But when it came along for me to go to college, as luck would have it, the banks had just failed, and what little I had saved up to go to school was lost. Not quite all of it lost, but

at least deferred to where I couldn't get my hands on it. So I went away to school on a music fellowship. I taught music and conducted the college band. My three older brothers had attended North Carolina State. We lived right on the edge of the campus of North Carolina State.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1; BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Williamson: So when it came time for me to go to school, I had \$7.00 in my pocket, which wasn't enough to buy the bus fare. So I got on the street and thumb-wagged, went away to Lewisburg Junior College. I finished the junior college, and then I transferred over to Atlantic Christian College. It was in Lewisburg, North Carolina; Atlantic Christian is in Wilson, North Carolina.

While I was at Atlantic Christian, in addition to teaching music and conducting the band, I taught three little high school bands in nearby cities, plus in the summertime I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the music school there. So I was graduated. I'd been playing in the National Guard Band.

Just as luck would have it, my National Guard unit was the first one in the entire United States that was called up in September of 1940. I'd graduated in June. We were called up in

1940 for federal service. So I came in the service as an enlisted man, most unhappy, didn't want to be a soldier. I had had an appointment to the military academy when I was a sophomore in college, and turned it down because I did not want to be a military person. So I came in, ostensibly for one year. But that didn't work. Pretty obvious that we were going to be in much longer than one year, so I attended a school and was commissioned in March of '41, and stayed in the military continuously until '74. Actually, '75, I guess. I had a total, with my National Guard service, of 40 years and 21 days, I think it was, in the military.

Then as far as the academic, after coming into the military, I was fortunate in that I did attend each and every one of the ladder of the military schools to include the two basic infantry schools, then into the Command General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, and the National War College. So I did have the privilege of the entire military educational ladder. I went to the graduate school of business at Harvard since then, and I have a master's also in political science from George Washington University. My academic, as well as my military training, continued during my service. I guess that's all inherited from my parents, the thought that academic training is not too bad. I enjoy it.

Q: What did you do during World War II?

Williamson: As far as military service is concerned, I'm told that I've had more actual troop command than any general officer that we have. I had 21 years of troop command service. I came in as an infantryman. I stayed in infantry, front-line outfit, throughout World War II, and then went down to the infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia, and taught infantry tactics for three years. Then to Leavenworth for the Command and General Staff College.

Then to Korea. Actually, we went to Tokyo. The war was just starting as I was finishing Leavenworth. I was on the staff to plan the Inchon landing in Korea. I made the Inchon landing in the forward elements with the Marine division. I stayed over there what they called a double tour; I stayed there two years as a G-3 of the Tenth Corps.

Came back for a two-year tour on the Army staff, went to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk. Came back to the Pentagon and was on the staff of the Secretary of Defense. I went from there to command an infantry regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado, and took it to Europe, commanded it in Europe for three years. Was on the Army staff over there for a year, came back to the National War College, took parachute training, came up to the Army staff for full tour.

Went from the Army staff to Okinawa, where I organized a very special unit. This was in '63. The Army decided that we were going to do everything we can to advance the state of the art, and we're going to organize experimental units and try every new thought that comes up. So they organized two major units with two different approaches. Organized one at Fort Benning, Georgia. That was called the air assault division. In other words, learning to use helicopters and things like that. Their approach was to have people, the Army staff in the school systems and what have you, write out procedures that they thought would work, write them out in just as great a detail as they could, send them to Benning, and have Benning try them and see if they were practical.

I was put over on the island of Okinawa, which was intentionally out of the limelight, and organized what they called the Pacific Fire Brigade, the only airborne separate brigade that we had in the Army. My mission was to try new ideas based on just ideas, rather than the printed page, the mimeographed sheet, and what have you. I was given absolute top priority as far as personnel was concerned; I got the pick of the West Point graduating class. I got the pick of the non-commissioned officer schools and things of that sort. I got the very best people that could be had, and I was given a balanced command of infantry and artillery and engineers and



signalmen, tanks and helicopters and what have you, and told to, "Just try ideas, anything that works well. Perfect it as best you can. Write it up in skeleton form, if necessary, but write it enough that it can be understood back at the headquarters, and send it back."

So I was an experimental unit over there. We experimented by parachute dropping of supplies. We even parachuted our tanks. We just tried it all. We sent patrols out on submarines. We operated from aircraft carriers. We made parachute jumps in eight different foreign countries for the next two years. I think we made some 85,000 parachute jumps all over the Far East, just trying new ideas.

Incidentally, I'm very, very proud of the fact that we made all those parachute jumps without permanently injuring a single man. Nobody killed. A lot of us were hurt, a lot of us bumped up a little bit, but nobody permanently injured. Incidentally, I became an airplane pilot, too, both fixed-wing and helicopter.

Then when the buildup started in Vietnam, we were the Pacific Reserves, so we were naturally the first ones to go down. So the Marines went in the north, and we went in the south. We were charged with holding the door open until the units from the States could get there. I stayed over one year with that. I then commanded a training center for two years and returned to Vietnam to command a division for a year.

I came back to the Pentagon for a two-year assignment, then went to Iran for a two-year assignment. I then got seriously ill and was hospitalized for six months and had to retire, much to my chagrin. I was not ready to retire.

Q: During World War II, did you serve in Europe?

Williamson: Yes. We went over. I was in England for six months, preparing for the Channel crossing. I made the Channel crossing and landed in there, went all the way across to the end of the war.

Q: D-Day?

Williamson: No, D plus 4. We were in what they called the floating reserve. The Germans didn't want us to come in, so they were kind of mean about it, and we were just floating around. There was a counterattack between two of our forward divisions, the 1st and the 29th, and we were jammed in between those two, and stayed in and went on until the end of the war in Europe. By then I was commanding a regiment, and we were being deployed, supposedly going to the Far East, so we came back through, stopped in England for just a few weeks, three weeks, I guess, and then came on, landed in New York, and were given a month's

leave. The atomic bomb was dropped while we were in England. We were given 30 days' leave. We were to assemble at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Before the 30 days were out, they sent a message out, extending it to 45 days.

Then when I went to Fort Jackson, expecting to assemble my command, I didn't get much. I released, I think it was 5,100 people at the New York port, and word went out that the Army was being--we called it demolished, instead of demobilized. People were sent messages, "If you don't want to stay in the service, go to your nearest processing station and be separated." So of the 5,100, I got 600 back. (Laughs) So I didn't have many people for a regiment. So we were all reassigned.

Q: At what point did you decide that you wanted a military career? You said you were dubious about it before.

Williamson: That was over a long period of time, I'd say. I think probably early in my commissioned service. As I mentioned, I was an enlisted man on about six months of active duty from September until March. Then as a junior officer, I just liked people, and the Army, more than any of the other services, except the Marines, are people oriented. Working with people just sort of impressed me. So actually, before we were sent overseas in 1944, I applied for a regular commission. My application was

approved all the way up to the top, and I'd been told it was approved, and I was just waiting to have my swearing-in. Then I was informed, just before we left, that the Department of the Army had discontinued regular commissions until after the war, and that my application would be held in abeyance, and it was. I was commissioned in the regular army after I came back home.

Q: You mentioned that you were involved in the Korean War. You helped plan the Inchon landing.

Williamson: Yes.

Q: How far into North Korea did you actually go?

Williamson: You mean physically?

Q: Yes.

Williamson: All the way.

Q: Into Yalu?

Williamson: Yes. We made the Inchon landing, which literally cut off the enemy forces down there. General MacArthur explained

it very plainly, he said, "It's going to be just like you had an electric fan sitting here on the desk, and you walk over to the wall and pull the cord." He said, "As our Inchon landing is successful, they will have to withdraw," which was absolutely true. They did. And it just destroyed their forces.

Then we swung around, after we deployed back from Inchon and from Pusan, came around and landed at Won San. Went up the east coast and on across, and got involved all the way up to the biggest battles around the Chosan reservoir. We had forces that went all the way to the Yalu River. We were spread. Our corps was responsible for almost 400 miles. It was spread all over everywhere.

Then we came back after the Chinese came in, and we came around, came back through Pusan, then up until the end of the war. So I actually stayed two years in Korea. I stayed until the front was completely stabilized.

Then I came back on the Army staff and handled all the communications for the Panmunjom negotiations. I lived Korea for three years, four years almost.

Q: Through about '53 or so, were you there?

Williamson: I came back in '52, and I had this job of communications handling for almost two years.

Q: You mentioned earlier that you worked in the Defense Department in the mid-fifties. You were in the ISA [International Security Affairs] division?

Williamson: Yes. I was in ISA when I finished the Armed Forces Staff College, and that was '54, '55, and '56. I left ISA in '56.

Q: What were your duties at International Security Affairs, generally?

Williamson: I was in what they called MDAP, Military Defense Assistance Program. We handled the military assistance for 147 different countries, and we thought we were managing the programs, and we were responsible for making the congressional presentations. I went over to Congress every year and participated in those exercises, usually as a horse-holder. I didn't do a lot of talking, but some. But we were involved in the Military Assistance Program.

Incidentally, during that period of time, the country of Iran was singled out as one of the few underdeveloped countries that could accept military assistance and, in time, be on its own.

Q: That was a planning assumption at that point.

Williamson: That was a planning assumption, and from the standpoint of the program, was implemented. This is something that a lot of people don't quite understand. We did, in fact, give as a donation, a grant--grant aid, it was called--a good bit of World War II surplus equipment. That was a gift. Then we started the FMS, the Foreign Military Sales program. Initially, we had the Iranians pay for the spare parts for the items that we had given them, and as time went on, the Iranians paid for everything to include the item itself, the spare parts, the technical manuals, the training, plus a portion of the research and development expense of our making the item initially, under FMS.

All of that was a developmental thing. But to give you an idea, by the time I got over there in 1971, I got over there before the Iranians' big bash, what I call their debutante ball. It was a "coming out" party, and they had representatives, top level, the top man in most instances, 69 different countries over there to celebrate their "debutante ball." As they put it, they would join the community of advanced nations, and they wanted everybody to see what they had done. But from then on, the Shah said, "There are several things." When I say "the Shah," he