

1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project: Transcript of Interview

Interviewer: Thomas Hunt

Narrator: Colonel Jim Moore, 1964 and 1968 Olympic Games, Modern Pentathlon

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begin recording

[Thomas Hunt:] As we start, I had a few, sort of, just entry biographical questions and we wanted to get a sense for how you got involved first in the modern pentathlon and where you grew up and things like that. And I should say that this interview is to get as much information as we can about your vision for the legacy of the 1968 Games and what they mean to you. So I am going to be silent as much as possible so that you can talk as much as possible, if that makes sense?

[Jim Moore:] (laughs) Okay.

[TH:] So anyway, how did you get involved in the modern pentathlon?

[JM:] Well, it's a sport not too many people know about and I had followed the Olympics as a child and I didn't know anything about it. I went to University of Pittsburgh on a track scholarship. I had to take ROTC because in 1953 the draft was on and I could be drafted. So I took ROTC because of my scholarship. They didn't want to train me for a couple of years and then I would be drafted out. So I received a commission upon graduation. Went to Germany as an Army Cav officer in 1957 and the Cold War was pretty hot then. I was on border duty and qualifying tankers at Grafenwoehr and I said, There's got to be a better way than this. I'd just been married and saw my wife the first three months in Germany for about a weekend and I read in the *Stars and Stripes*, which is a newspaper in Europe for the military. It said, How would you

like to go to Athens, Greece to participate in military pentathlon? You have to be able to run and swim. I could have had a swimming scholarship but I knew I was a better runner. So I had to run and swim, and I made an application and was selected. Also in the article, it said if you're selected, you can go to Athens, Greece for a month to train. And I thought, Wow, that'd be neat; I'd take my wife. So I did. We went there and we trained for a month and I had Sally in Athens with me. The competition just clicked, military pentathlon, different from modern pentathlon. I'm the only American ever to win the military pentathlon, to date. They heard about it at the Department of Army Sports and said, How would you like to try modern pentathlon? I said, I don't even know what modern pentathlon is. They said, Well it's an Olympic Event; it was started in 1912 by the Swedes; the first American competitor was George S. Patton, Jr., who later become a famous general in the Second World War, and you go to Fort Sam Houston and train. I thought, Wow, that's better than this cold Germany and FTX—Field Training Exercises—and border duty. So, I said, Sign me up! And in June of 1959, I reported in to Fort Sam Houston, where then the national training center was. It was under the army at that time. It is now under the Olympic Committee because the army stopped funding it and so on.

[TH:] Hm. Very interesting. And that's a long time from the early fifties to the '68 games. What did you involve yourself in over those years?

[JM:] Well, you know, I ran in college and then went to the army officer basic course and graduated and then immediately went to Europe from graduation and took Sally with me. And that's how I kind of explain, you know? I just wasn't home and I tried out for this military pentathlon and that's how I won it and then got selected for modern pentathlon and started training in it.

[TH:] I'm sensing after I interviewed Tom Lough around a month ago and he had gone to West Point and also found his way into the modern pentathlon through the military. Were most of the competitors military or was y'all's two experiences an exception to the norm?

[JM:] No. I think most of the people, since it was sort of subsidized by the military, that they--if you had certain qualifications in running and swimming--they could teach you the skill events of horseback riding and fencing and shooting. So I qualified in the running and swimming as I guess, Tommy did too. And that's how I got selected at Fort Sam. And immediately we started taking swimming lessons, and riding lessons, and horse jumping. And as you know, horsemanship--the host country that's hosting the, whatever competition--furnishes the horses. And so you have to really know what you're doing on the horse to be able to control a twelve hundred pound animal and jump twenty-four jumps because he would rather sit in the stall eating hay than be out there and jumping a course. So you really have to make him do that. It's quite a sport.

[TH:] Yes. And in fact, I'll want to come back to host nation selecting the horses because Tom certainly had a unique perspective on that. But first, I'd like to talk a bit about how you trained for the event. Was it all at Fort Sam Houston or did you travel around? High altitude training, for example, I could see would be of great benefit given the altitude of Mexico City. Anyway, anything you remember about the training that you did?

[JM:] Well, I started in June of 1959 and from Europe, which is just cold, to San Antonio in June; I thought I was in hell. I'm from the Northeast, Pennsylvania, and I just never experienced the heat and running in it and riding horses in it. At least the fencing we did was inside and air-conditioned. The shooting was outside, so it was quite different for me. But you have to train five

sports a day so there's no transition in your muscles going from swimming pool to fencing to running. You have to do these over and over and over again so that you don't cramp up. Take a swimmer like Josh Davis, gold medal winner from Texas. He would have a hard time running, I think, without training in it. So they trained us five and a half days a week in five sports for five days. And then you'd usually do running on Saturday, something long and they had more compassion on the horses because we would ride them early in the morning so they wouldn't get too hot but they didn't care about us. I think we ran at six o'clock at night. (laughs)

[TH:] You know, that sounds a little like our dog. She has better medical care than we do.

[JM:] Yeah. (laughs)

[TH:] Did you go up to Colorado for any of the altitude training that Tom mentioned?

[JM:] I did. In 1962, I was an alternate on the team. There are three members on a team, and then there's an alternate. The world championships were in Mexico City, so we went up there for altitude training and, interesting to note that what we did—. Colorado has a, I guess, I don't know what you would call it, some kind of instrument/place where people sleep and look at the weather up at Pike's Peak. So, we went up there for five days and got altitude sickness and got sicker than dogs and then came down, but we felt pretty good! And we stayed at the Air Force Academy and trained there.

[TH:] Um-hm. And I took you from '59 to '62; do you remember anything else about the training that was unique or exceptional?

[JM:] Well, in San Antonio there's not much fencing other than among ourselves, so we'd go to New York where there's big fencing. We would go on competitions to Europe for modern

pentathlon because where else is modern pentathlon in the United States except at Fort Sam? So we would go over there and compete and then, in advance, we would find out where they're having fencing competitions and go and fence with the épée, of course, that's the weapon that we used. There's foil épée and saber épée and we fenced with the épée, which is all electric.

[TH:] Hmm. Very interesting. And, I believe—. Did you compete in '64?

[JM:] Yes! Yeah, in '64 I was sixth individually and had a fantastic run and we won the silver medal, team, in 1964. And my other teammates, I think, were twenty-four and thirty-six, or something like that; but we won the silver medal, team, which I have hanging in my den. But it was mainly a team event until around the fifties when the Russians started getting into it. Then they started doing the top three individuals and then the top three teams. So, in '64 you can go back and see in Tokyo that it was the Russians, the Americans, and Hungarians. For years before that, the Russians and Hungarians dominated it. For instance, in Russia, they have actively participating, leading to their championships were they select a team, five thousand athletes and here in the United States, we maybe had thirty or forty. And all other countries—Sweden, Italy, Germany—they all had soldiers/athletes that could train full time and participate in sport. If you try to do it as an individual on your own, you either have to be, you know, rich and be able to have your own horses and a place to fence and a shooting range and all that jazz, where if you were in the military it was provided here at Fort Sam.

[TH:] Got you. And as those Games ended, I suppose that—. First, well, what happened after the Tokyo Games, before the '68 Games? Then I'm interested in hearing about the comparison of Mexico City to Tokyo. But anyway, please go on with after the Tokyo Olympics.

[JM:] Well, after the Games—. Here I'm a career officer. When I went down to Fort Sam in '59 I was a first lieutenant and I was there for, I think, about two years. And then my career branch said, Hey, you got to get out of there if you want to be promoted. So they sent me off to schools and off to different things. But once you learn the basic training things, you can kind of train on your own. And Bob Miller, for instance, trained in the military and then became a swimming instructor up in Washington state and he was able to get a lot of training on his own and come back and make teams. So if you get that basic training, you can go off and then train on your own and come back. And of course, that's what I did after '64 to '68. I was off doing my military duty. And then after '68, got back and was sent to Viet Nam for a year and never got back into it again. Because, well, then I was twenty-nine in '64 and thirty-three in '68. And then, you know, you're getting up in years. But I think the older you get, the more you can fence and know what you're doing fencing and control your emotions and your shooting. And you don't worry about the horses anymore because you have that experience. And the running doesn't really leave you until you're around forty-five. At least that's what I've experienced. So, I kept training on my own until '68, came back, and won the Olympic trials again—I won them in '64—and made the team and went on to Olympics in Mexico City.

I was stationed in Korea—remember I told you I was. It goes back to '62. After I was there a couple of years, they sent me on assignment to Korea for a year and while I was there, they sent me to Japan for some training from Department of the Army. Where I was stationed, they couldn't believe it that I got orders to go to Japan and participate in a goodwill meet. (laughs) And so I trained there on the same horses that they used, used the same swimming pool, the same—. Well, I fenced in the national institute with them, right downtown in Tokyo where the Emperor lives. And they had a big fencing cell there and I fenced there and ran on my own at

Camp Zama, Japan. That was an army installation. I forget; where am I? (laughs) I'm telling you the story. What else do you want to know?

[TH:] Oh, I suppose, once you got to Mexico City, how did it compare to Tokyo, if that makes sense?

[JM:] Yeah, we went a year earlier for a meet and the swimming pool wasn't ready. They had good horses. The fencing wasn't in the place where we were going to have the competition for the Olympics. You know, running you can put anywhere. So when we got there the next year for the Olympics, we were surprised to see how beautiful the pool was. But underneath the pool they had a practice pool and all they had was a pool and nothing else around it was finished off. It was just a pool and you had to walk to a restroom a long ways away and they just weren't anywhere near ready like the Japanese were. They really had their ducks in a row in Japan. But it went off without a hitch. I guess, once you know what you're doing, you don't have to have all these niceties. You know what you're going to expect when you're getting training and you're getting ready to compete.

[TH:] Sure. What were your actual accommodations like there and the actual food, for example? I imagine that would be a real worry, at least on my trips to Mexico.

[JM:] Well, yeah, it was. I had been to Mexico a couple times for fencing competitions and for other pentathlon competitions and got sick each time. But the Olympic Committee gave us sulfa tablets that we were supposed to take to keep from getting sick and they had three different restaurants for the Olympic athletes: American-type food, Eastern—I guess Chinese/Japanese food—European food, French, and so on. So, they had these four different restaurants where you could go and during our competition we, of course, just ate in the American and had bottled

water. And I guess I didn't even eat any salad or anything for fear that they would wash the salad in the water and so on. But I ate everything cooked, at least before and after and during the competition. But, yeah, the food was good.

[TH:] Good. Did you become particularly close to anyone on the team, either during training or during the Games?

[JM:] You know, we say pentathlon team, but you're competing against everyone else for a slot on the team. So, I guess you don't make real, real close relationships because you're trying to beat the guy that's with you. And I think Tommy and I became quite close during the competition after we had our selection for the Olympic trials and stayed very close, mainly because I'm a Christian and he's a Christian and we believe in the same values. We have gotten closer and any time he comes down through this way, we get together and re-hash old days.
(laughs)

[TH:] Sure. I'm sure. Did you meet anybody say, from the other end of the Iron Curtain? This was the height of the Cold War, Viet Nam is going on—.

[JM:] Yes. Paul Pesthy was a Hungarian refugee, came over here in '56. His father was a fencing master and I think they went through Mexico and then he came up here, joined the army and because he was a junior modern pentathlon champion, they sent him into Fort Sam. And I remember when I first got there in 1959, he had very broken English. Drove like a crazy man, since he was enlisted; the officers didn't drive these carry-alls. But after we would ride in the morning, we would go down to Lone Star brewery. They had a fifty meter pool and they let us use it in the mornings. So he would drive down there and he was crazy going down the freeways and stuff, and finally, we just wouldn't let him drive anymore. But anyway, he was very good

in pentathlon and he made the '68—I mean the '64 team. Of course, his buddies from Budapest and the Russians and so on knew of him because of his Junior standing and they were always around. I was his roommate and they were always around talking and it was quite interesting. There was no animosity between the Russians or the Hungarians and the Americans or Swedes or anybody else. You know, you're a competitor; you don't care about the political thing. And then of course, in 1980, the stupid president called off the games because the Russians were in Afghanistan. Carter called them off. And of course, who's in Afghanistan now? But anyway, well, I'm still ticked-off about that. (laughs)

[TH:] Yes. It's very ironic. We were actually talking about that in my class today. Well, Paul is an interesting case due to the, you know, '56 was the same year of the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

[JM:] Hungary! Sure.

[TH:] Yeah, and I'm surprised there wasn't more animosity between the Hungarians and the Russians, not necessarily the Americans.

[JM:] There was in water polo. See, you're a lot closer, and, you know, body contact and so on. And there were a lot of bloody things going on in that. But in pentathlon, five different sports, I think there's more respect for one another than just being a big guy who can swim and then throw the ball. Of course, you know, the Hungarians wanted to beat the Russians and the Russians wanted to beat the Hungarians and the Americans, and so on, but I never saw anything, you know, where they would run into you or be obnoxious or anything like that.

[TH:] Sure. In terms of—and this is a broader question. What to you, is the most meaningful part of the '68 Games?

[JM:] Well, I guess I knew it was my last chance at winning another medal. I had come in just before the Olympic trials and I'd been training on my own. I was more mature at thirty-three and I just felt that I could do well. And so, I looked at it—. But it was quite—. You know, I just felt—even though I was thirty-three and a lot of the competitors were there in their twenties—I could do well but I didn't do as well as I did in '64. But it was my last hooray, I knew, and I had to get on with my military career. So, that was—. You know, I really enjoyed it, more than I did '64. I could sit back, and after the Games—since I was on a track scholarship—track and field was my most interesting thing. And right after our competition was over, we went to the Olympic stadium and came in the side where the athletes weren't supposed to sit. But I was standing, or we were sitting, right down front and Beamon was in the long jump and he came down and jumped outside of the pit. He just hit inside and then, you know, flipped out of the pit. And I said, Oh my goodness! He must have really fouled over the line where you jump. And it was a clean jump and he jumped something like twenty-nine feet, which had never been done before that. Jesse Owens held a record of twenty-six and it was fabulous. I was right there when that happened.

[TH:] Everybody I've talked to that saw it said it was one of the most amazing athletic feats they've had the honor of seeing.

[JM:] Yeah. Just to walk in, sit down, watch him take off, and was there for that. And then, he was so overcome emotionally that his legs were like rubber. They tried to get him up to walk and he couldn't. He was just crying and, you know, like rubber. He was—. It was really neat—one of those moments that you'll never forget in your life.

[TH:] Were there any other moments like that at the competitions for you?

[JM:] Um. Yeah, I guess. Uh, the black athletes, you know, when they were on the medal stand always held their fist up and I wasn't too impressed with that since I was military and here I fought; and then right after that I went to Viet Nam. You know, that was another thing that stuck in my claw. I didn't particularly like that, though you have to respect their athleticism.

And another thing—I think it was Fosbury Flop. In high jump, I was standing or sitting there with all the athletes in the athletes section and high jump was right in front of us. And that was the first time, I think, the Fosbury Flop was put into Olympic Games and he just outshined everybody. Where you go over backwards? You know? Usually you run up and one leg would go over; and here he went over backwards. That was quite an interesting thing also.

[TH:] Oh, yeah. To go back to the fists in the air—it's a sensitive subject but, of course, it's what the '68 Games are most known for among Americans today. When did you first hear about it or were you there when it happened?

[JM:] I was sitting in the stands. The pentathlon is usually the first five days of competition and they you have—you know; it goes on for two weeks. Towards the end of the first week, I think, the track and field starts and it ends, I think, the last day with the marathon and things like that. I was always not interested that much in the other events as I was track and field. So whenever the track and field was on, I had a free ticket; I was there. I enjoyed everything there was in track and field.

[TH:] How did you feel about it, first seeing it? I know you mentioned that you weren't impressed. And did that feeling change over time? Do you feel the same way today as you did then?

[JM:] Oh, no! Gees! I'm seventy five, soon to be seventy six years old and you know, I was young and full of— whatever they call it—vinegar. It upset me because I was in active duty then. But, you know, they were put down for years and I can look back now and—. They had to do something to be recognized as individuals. The bible doesn't make any distinction between race and color and nationalities and things. We're just—I don't know how to say it. You know, we're influenced by how we're brought up and things like that. But I have no animosity and I look back and they had to do something, just like Martin Luther King had to do something.

[TH:] Um-hm. That's very much Tom's answer, too. And in a slightly different direction, and this is my sort of area of expertise; these were also the first Games—well, I suppose the Winter Olympics of that year were the first, but this was the first really major Summer Games—to have testing for performance enhancing substances. Did you have to do one of those tests?

[JM:] Oh! Yes. No, I was tested in '64.

[TH:] Really?

[JM:] Oh, yeah, after the shooting event and after the running since I had run so well. After the shooting, they took both blood and urine and after the running and swimming, I had to give urine tests. So, yes, they did it in '64 and '68. You know, we just expected it. There was a big—. Well, the Americans were upset because we knew the East Germans and the Russians and Hungarians were using drugs to calm them down for the shooting event. That was a big thing. You get an athlete who can fence like crazy, and the day before, his reactions must be pinpoint sharp and be able to take advantage of parry riposte. And then the next day, he's got to be completely relaxed. When he brings his pistol up, he has three seconds to find his sites and to squeeze off the shot because the targets are turning. You know, they flip on you, back and forth.

And so, there are seven seconds that they are on the edge, where you can't see the targets and they flip for three seconds and you have to bring your pistol up, find your sights, and squeeze the shot off before it flips back on the side. It irked us that they could shoot so well, knowing the day before—with the fencing, since it's electric, you have to hook yourself up to these reels on the fencing strip—they could hardly put their electrical connections together because they were so nervous. (laughs)

We, of course, couldn't do anything like that—or wouldn't. So, it just kind of irked us. And that's why they started testing, especially after the shooting. They were always a jump ahead. You know, whatever they would list as performance enhancing or calming drugs, whatever they took was never on the list.

[TH:] That continues to be a problem, I think.

[JM:] I think so, yeah.

[TH:] From your perspective, did it feel like an invasion of privacy? Or as an American, was it not a big deal because it was the other guys that were doing it and getting caught?

[JM:] Being in the military, I had so many shots and tests and so on. You know, it never bothered me. You know, take the blood, give the urine sample. It was no big deal. Maybe some of the civilians would balk at that but you're pretty hardened when you've been in the military for so many years. But that's an answer I don't know.

[TH:] Oh, absolutely. After you returned home, what sort of reception did you receive? And did you have any down time or did you head straight back for deployment? What was the return home like?

[JM:] In '68?

[TH:] Uh-huh.

[JM:] Let's see. I guess it was towards—I don't remember the month. I guess it was around September, October, and I was in country in Viet Nam end of December. I was there a year, until the next year; I guess January, then, of '69 -'70. So I was there the whole year of '69. In Viet Nam, I was with the Ninth Division. It was the only division south of Saigon on the Mekong River. The river was on one side of our base camp and then the other three sides were jungle. And it was so thick that they used Agent Orange all around so that we'd have fields of fire because the Viet Cong would just crawl right up into your lap, just about. So I got prostate cancer and had to have treatment, and so on, from the Agent Orange. And I'm affected by that yet today. But, you know, that's just a side story.

Oh! In '68, the horse—this is altogether a different thing—but the horses go off at five minute intervals. You draw a number out of a hat and that number is painted on the hoof of the animal. For instance, if you draw thirteen, number thirteen is painted on the hoof of the animal and they jog thirteen in front of you and if it has four legs on it, that's what you're going to ride in the competition. So I looked at the horse and, of course, my riding instructor did. But you have twenty minutes before you start to put your saddle on, bridle, and warm-up in the little ring and they have a little jump in the ring just to make sure the horse can jump. To make a long story short, they were calling my name with ten seconds to go, five seconds to go and my horse had not jumped that little jump in the center of the ring and here I was ready to go out and get a zero score for our team. And my riding instructor yelled at me to go to—what do they call it, when a horse is—striding—to go to two strides to the left of the fence. You never do that. You go

straight for the middle of the fence. And I took two strides, and as they were counting down—five, four, three, two, one—I jumped the fence and I’m galloping to the starting line and my coach is saying, “That the way to take everything!” That was sort of an emotional—. The horse was all lathered up. I was all lathered up. I’ll never forget that.

[TH:] I’m sure. I can’t imagine just twenty minutes with a horse and that’s all the practice that the two of you have together.

[JM:] Yep, and you have to warm ‘em up. I mean, you just don’t start jogging around and jump the fence. You have to trot ‘em and then you canter ‘em and you got to loosen ‘em up. You wouldn’t go out and run a hundred, ten-meter high hurdles without warming up and jogging around and getting loose. (laughs)

[TH:] I can’t walk across the room without getting loose, I think, first.

[JM:] (laughs)

[TH:] What piece of advice would you give, say, one of today’s Olympic hopefuls, given your experience?

[JM:] Let’s see—advice. I guess my advice was that, being a Christian, you have trust in yourself and in your own values, I think, more than some other people would, and I used that to train hard. I don’t think I was the most natural athlete but I was able to train hard. You know, it sounds romantic to train five sports a day, but it gets old after awhile. And to have your body go through that training five sports a day—day after day, month after month, getting ready for competitions—you have to have belief in something, that the lord is going to help you through this and help you, not necessarily win—I don’t believe in that—but that would keep you strong

and keep your mind on training. And you have to be very focused. Swimmers are the same way. I don't see how they can get in the pool and swim all those laps day after day. It would drive me up the wall. To this day, I would rather go out and run ten miles than to swim a mile in the pool. But that's me. But you have to be very focused and train hard and believe in yourself. And I think that's about what I'd tell anybody.

[TH:] That makes good sense. In terms of the preservation of the '68 Team legacy, this is Tom's and our big vision. Had you thought about this prior to being contacted by Tom and now that you have, what does it mean to you?

[JM:] You know, for Tom it was one Olympics; for me, it was my second. I was older. I enjoyed it more. I did better in the '64 Olympics and thought that, you know, that was—. You know, if I only had competed in that Games, you know, I was really satisfied. But I don't know what kind of legacy—. I guess I'd have to think about that for a while and look at the results of all the other events that were competed in and we did—rowing; and I know we did well in swimming. You know a lot of the sports that people don't even think of—women in field hockey, the equestrian events. I guess I'd have to look at the whole thing to give you what I thought of the legacy.

[TH:] Sure. And if you'd like to do that, that would be wonderful. And we can talk again or we can communicate via email or however else.

[JM:] Okay.

[TH:] And I guess—to my last question—is there anything else that you feel is important and that you'd like to tell us.

[JM:] You mean in athletics or—?

[TH:] In any sense.

[JM:] I think I matured a lot through the hard training. I mean, how many competitors train from morning 'til evening day after day? I mean, the swimmers go swim for a couple hours and runners run and shooters shoot for maybe a couple hours and then go about their business. But it's so much different. And I think it has really matured me, helped me with my army career, I think helped me with raising my own children, and the way I think I've gotten closer through my being a cancer survivor to my Lord. I think it really matured and helped me in life.

[TH:] As we speak about life after the '68 Games, did you stay in the army? Or how did you end up to where you are today, if that makes sense?

[JM:] Yeah, I was in the military twenty-five years. So I was in, let's see, '58 and I retired in about '82. So yes, I was in a lot longer. I was working for a colonel and he said, Look, don't be asking time off to train. If you're going to train, do it on your own; do your job; don't let anybody know you're a jock and if you get orders to go, then go.

So I always tried to do my job first—when I wasn't with the team— and made all my promotions, retired as a full colonel. And I think that was good advice because after I finished competing, I still had a career and I had a family and I think, like I said, it matured me and helped me live a better life.

[TH:] Are there any other questions you have? I think that's the last of my questions, unless you have anything else. And if not, I think the next step will be for us to type this out and then we'll send it off to you to look at and see if you have anything you want to change or anything you

want to add. And in addition, while we're doing that, if you want to think about anything and the larger legacy, things like that, that would be great as well.

[JM:] Yeah, I found a lot on the Internet, so maybe I'll go to that and see what I can pull up and see how, overall, what we did and compare them, if I can, to '64. Because, you know, you're google-eyed your first Olympics and your second one, you're four years older and you're more mature and you can look at things a little different, I think.

[TH:] Sure. Well, thank you so much for this and we will talk to you soon.

[JM:] Okay! Great.

[TH:] Thanks very much.

[JM:] Nice talking to you. Okay, bye.

[TH:] You bet.

end of interview, end recording

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