

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
BERNARD D. COOK JR.
Air Traffic Control, Air Force, World War II.

1995

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Cook, Bernard D., Jr., (1922-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Bernard D. Cook discusses his flight training and time spent in the Philippines and Okinawa with the 141st AACS Squadron before being discharged in September, 1946.

Cook, born in New London (Wisconsin) and a graduate of West Division High School, Milwaukee, discusses work as a machine operator in the steam turbine department at Allis Chalmers, wages, and women working in the shop. Cook describes the challenges he met trying to volunteer for the Army before quitting his job to change his draft classification and mentions his feelings for volunteering. Inducted at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) and completing basic training at Keesler Field (Mississippi), Cook talks about the reasons why he thought basic training was poor, Army Air Corps requirements, and the "cycle motor test." Cook talks about pre-flight school at San Antonio (Texas), taking classes at Mississippi State College and mentions the length of time spent in pre-flight, primary, basic and advanced flying schools. He describes the Stearman airplane and his efforts getting to his first solo flight after which he volunteered to attend Air Traffic Control School at Sheppard Field (Texas). Cook chats about his route to Manila where he was assigned to the 141st Army Airway Communications System Squadron. Cook discusses building the air traffic control center outside Manila (Philippines), keeping track of flight plans, manpower shortages and maintenance. Cook was then sent to Naha (Okinawa) to run a tower and ground control approach (GCA) radar where he talks about making practice GCA approaches to maintain currency. Cook mentions his impressions of Okinawa, speaking with an Okinawan girl in English, and the destruction of supplies stored along the airstrip at Naha. Returning to the States in September 1946, Cook outprocessed at Fort Sheridan (Illinois), joined the Air Reserve squadron in Milwaukee, and enrolled for college. He describes the living conditions at Badger Village, bus trips to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to attend classes, and the jobs he did to provide for needs not covered by the GI Bill. Cook concludes the interview mentioning why he joined the American Legion for a year and bringing home a souvenir Japanese rifle.

Biographical Sketch

Cook (1920-) born and raised in New London (Wisconsin), volunteered for the Army Air Corps in 1943 and served with the 141st AACS Squadron in Manila and Okinawa before returning in 1946. Discharged in September, 1946, Cook completed his bachelor's degree in science and began working for General Electric.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, 1996.

Transcription edited by John J. McNally, 2006.

- Mark: Okay. Today's date is September 26, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview over the telephone this afternoon with Mr. Bernard Cook, presently of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a Wisconsin native and a veteran of World War II. Good afternoon.
- Cook: Good afternoon.
- Mark: Thanks for taking some time to talk to me today. I suppose we can start at the beginning as they say. Why don't you tell me a little about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Cook: All right. I was born in New London, Wisconsin. I lived most of my pre-World War II life in Milwaukee. I graduated from West Division High School in Milwaukee. My father had a business on Juneau Avenue, 12th and Juneau. That took up most of my spare time.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, these were the Depression years of course. Did your father's business do okay?
- Cook: Yeah, yeah. His business was selling light machine tools. Delta Manufacturing Company was in Milwaukee at that time and we were dealers for them and for the Atlas Press Company in Kalamazoo, Michigan. My high school experience was my diploma said I was, had completed the elective course. In other words, I concentrated on science kind of subjects so I was entered in the easily defined curriculum. I played in the band in high school, in the orchestra. After I was graduated a little later, I graduated in January 1941, and in the fall of '41, August, I went to work at Allis Chalmers.
- Mark: And what did you do there? Was it war work or was it just general sort of work?
- Cook: Well, it was sort of war. I worked in the steam turbine department as a machine operator, primarily making steam turbine blades but also what they called "detail work" which was one-of-a-kind things like bearings and pump bodies and things like that. I was there for two years.
- Mark: Did you have much trouble finding work? I mean, this is when the sort of build-up for World War II had begun and there were more factory orders then so I'd be curious to know if you had to look around for a job? Or if they were seeking people out.
- Cook: Well, I looked some. Actually a job that I had a little earlier in the year with a company that was called Rubber Displays Incorporated and they made mannequins out of a rubber and plaster composition and they were molded. I think I got about \$.45 an hour working there.
- Mark: And you got paid a lot more at Allis Chalmers I take it.

- Cook: Not a lot more. Actually, the rate there was \$.59 ½ an hour. But I worked there for a few weeks and was then put on piece work and we could turn in \$1 an hour. If we turned in more than that, they were back to re-time study the job, so we held it to \$1 an hour. When we got into the war there was, we worked seven days a week. I actually worked third shift, which was seven nights a week. That kept me pretty busy at that time.
- Mark: Yeah. So when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred you were working for Allis Chalmers at the time.
- Cook: That's correct.
- Mark: Do you recall the incident? I mean, do you recall your reaction to it?
- Cook: Oh, sure, sure. I heard it on the car radio in fact, when it occurred. It was quite a shock.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, of course you were all of what 19 by this time? Maybe 18.
- Cook: Yeah, 19.
- Mark: I'd be interested to know if you perceived any sort of, perceived the impact that this event would eventually have on your life. Or did the young guys even think about that sort of thing?
- Cook: Well, actually, prior to that time, prior, a little earlier in the year, you know the draft was going and you had to be 21 to be drafted at the time, and I was interested in going to college so I thought, well, I'll go and enlist for a year and I went and talked to the recruiting people and they said, well, I couldn't enlist for a year, I would have to enlist for three years and because of my age I would have to have my parents agree to this and they wouldn't. Inasmuch as I intended to get into engineering I thought, well, that I would go to work in a shop as a basis of experience for engineering so that's what I did.
- Mark: So, it wasn't until 1943 that you eventually entered the service.
- Cook: That's correct.
- Mark: How did your work at Allis Chalmers change after the war began? Did business pick up? Did orders pick up? Did people start leaving and coming in? I mean, did you work with the "Rosie the Riveter" types? Describe the ways things changed? Or didn't change whatever the case may be.

- Cook: There were a lot of women came in. And, in fact, I trained some of them to operate some of the machines. They built an additional shop to make turbine blades right next to the original shop that I worked in and they brought in people off of the street to do the work on the day shift. Then when they thought they were adequately trained, why, they moved them to second shift and brought in another batch to work on the day shift. Then when that group got satisfactorily trained, why, they moved everything over so that they had three full shifts working. There were quite a few women in this shop then.
- Mark: From what you could tell, did they work out well?
- Cook: Sure, sure. They were, they learned what they needed to do and they did it.
- Mark: So you eventually went into the service. Why don't you describe for me your decision to enter the military and where you went to pursue that goal.
- Cook: Well, they changed the draft age to 19. I don't remember, I think it was probably about 1943 or late '42. I guess it was late '42. So I then had to register for the draft and it turned out that my occupation deferred me from military service so I had a 2B draft classification. They were six month draft classification periods. After I had one of these periods expired, one or two of them, I hadn't been reclassified and I figured that I was 1A so I applied to get into the Air Corps in pilot training and the situation was that that didn't work.
- Mark: Why not?
- Cook: Because the draft board hadn't acted and I hadn't been reclassified. I had filled in the application for the Air Corps and I took it over to the draft board who had to sign it and the woman at the draft board pulled out my file and there was a big red rubber stamp across the outside of the file and she just lifted it up in the drawer and shoved it back and she said, "I can't sign the papers." and I said, "Well, why not?" and she said, "Well, you're deferred." and I said, "Well, I haven't heard from the draft board and the deferment is expired." and she said, "That didn't make any difference," that it wasn't until the draft board acted that I would be classified. So I asked her how to avoid that and she said, "Well, you fill out these forms." and the forms essentially were that I had no family responsibilities and that I didn't want to be deferred and when the postcard came I was deferred again. After I had filled out the form I went to the personnel people at Allis Chalmers and asked them not to ask for any more deferments for me and they refused to honor that request and I said, "Well, what if I quit?" and they said, "You can't do that." and so I quit. Then I was able to, well, then I had to convince the draft board subsequently that I was no longer employed at Allis Chalmers and they had to call Allis Chalmers to find out because Allis Chalmers didn't notify them. So the up-shot of it was that I finally got everyone convinced and got to take the examination and when they finally notified me that I had passed the examination they said that I would have to volunteer for induction right away because

if the draft picked me up that all bets were off and that I would wind up wherever they sent me so I volunteered for induction and then went through the induction process. It was somewhere like August of, September of 1943 that I—I made a list of dates.

Mark: That's quite a lot of work to get into the military which is kind of opposite of the stereotypical young man in the Vietnam Era. I'm interested in your insight into why you wanted to get into the military so badly. What did it mean to you? You obviously wanted to do it pretty badly. I'm interested if you would explain why that was.

Cook: Well, there was a definite need, I perceived, and I felt that I could make a contribution. Earlier they were looking for mechanics. Initially, to get into Aviation Cadet Program you had to have two years of college and then they eliminated that requirement, you just had to pass an exam. But early on they needed mechanics quite urgently. In fact, what they were doing was they had what they called "on the line" training which meant that you were gotten into the Army and you went directly to Australia to learn what you had to do while you were doing it. I had tried to volunteer for that and as soon as they found out that I had an occupational deferment, why, they wouldn't touch me. It was mostly that, as I say, I thought that I could make a contribution and so I did.

Mark: Was there any sort of ideological commitment? Sort of a revulsion against Fascism or Japanese militarism, or anything like that? Was it an ideological thing? Or patriotic gesture?

Cook: Well, it was partly that. Of course, the Pearl Harbor incident stood out pretty strongly so that, and there was, as you say, there was a lot of antipathy toward the Japanese and the Germans. That was partly a driver but as I say I had prior, even prior to the time that we were engaged in the war, I had tried to get into the ordnance and the means of getting over the draft obligation.

Mark: Uhm, okay. So you entered the service, you were inducted at Fort Sheridan was it?

Cook: Yes.

Mark: Then you went down to basic training at Keesler Field, Mississippi.

Cook: That's correct.

Mark: What sort of basic training did you do down there?

Cook: As far as infantry kind of basic training, it was very poor.

Mark: Did you fire weapons and that sort of thing?

Cook: We qualified on the carbine and we fired a Tommy-gun for familiarization. I guess we had a demonstration on field stripping a Garand rifle but we never fired a rifle. Most of our, we were supposed to, when we went to the rifle range we were all supposed to participate in an infiltration course which we didn't do and we only spent two nights in pup-tents. And that was just about the total experience. We did a lot of marching around and took hikes with full field pack and all that stuff but we would have been at a great disadvantage if we had gotten into combat on the ground.

Mark: Why is that?

Cook: Well, because we didn't have the training. When we were at the rifle range and set up our pup-tents it was wintertime and most of the men were, didn't have any outdoor experience. A lot of them were from Chicago and they didn't have the experience so they built big roaring fires and sat up around the fires all night 'cause they couldn't sleep in the cold and there were no sleeping bags so we had to do with our overcoats and blankets and raincoats, that sort of thing and it was cold and wet. That was the way they coped with it was to build big fires which you couldn't do under combat conditions on the ground.

Mark: Now, I went to basic training and, in fact, it was Air Force Basic Training about 40 years later and I remember discipline being fairly strict and a lot of screaming and yelling and four-letter words and that sort of thing. What sort of military discipline were you under and did you have similar experiences?

Cook: Well, in the basic training, was at Keesler Field, there wasn't, it was rigorous in that we had to behave ourselves and do what we were told and, of course, we were all a group that was pretty homogeneous.

Mark: How is that? You mean from ...

Cook: Because we all took the same examinations, we all had the same general physical capabilities. It wasn't just a helter-skelter group because it was all based on the Army Air Corps requirements. They were pretty fast in weeding out people so we were always paying pretty close attention to not being weeded out. At that time I, in retrospect, have an impression that they pretty well knew that even as late, or as early as the end of 1943, that the war was going to be winding down. Because there were a few people, a few men that had been in the Navy Aviation Cadet Program and their arrangement had been a little bit different. I guess they were able to resign and, of course, they would resign and become 1A and drafted into the infantry or something like that. But nonetheless they could resign from the Navy program and they had been told that their need for Navy pilots had decreased considerably and they were about to be more rigorously, more severely treated as far as standards were concerned and that most of them were going to wash out. So they had the option of either toughing it out and taking their chances or resigning and they said that the Army Air Corps was still building up some and that they would have a pretty good chance to get

into the Army Air Corps. So they did that and there were some of those guys in the group that I was in.

Mark: Now, in terms of the backgrounds that you guys came from, I would imagine it was a fairly well educated group. Would I be mistaken in that?

Cook: No.

Mark: I mean, there were certain qualifications after all.

Cook: Yeah. We took quite a battery of tests beginning with the initial one that we took as civilians. Then we took the general classification test at Fort Sheridan and then, while we were at Keesler Field, we went through what they call the "cycle motor test." It was a day or two of written examinations and a day of what I call a gadget test. It had various kinds of mechanical things that tested your coordination and that sort of thing. With that information you got a score and the score was, there were three elements to the score. One was ability to become a pilot, another was to become a navigator, and another was to become a bombardier. They didn't tell us how we made out on those things except that we had passed and were continuing on in the program. It wasn't until we got half way through the pre-flight school, which was a ten-week course, that we made a choice as to which direction we wanted to go. And you had to talk to a board of three officers and they knew what your scores were and you were not supposed to know. But anyway, I had indicated that I wanted to get into pilot training and so I told them that and I told them that was the only reason I went into the Air Corps. And so they were all ready for that and they had the papers all made out all ready but they tried to persuade me that I had scored even higher on another occupation and to just see how resolved I was I guess. And so then they, our second half of our pre-flight school was then directed more toward the occupation that we had been selected for.

Mark: Uh hum. And for you that was pilot.

Cook: Yeah.

Mark: When did you first fly an airplane? I'm looking at the sheet you gave me here of all the different schools you went to, and you went to quite a few different places here. Pre-flight, San Antonio; Primary School, Goodfellow Field; Basic Flying, Goodfellow Field; Advanced Flying, Pampa Army Air Field. When did you first jump behind the cockpit and solo as they say?

Cook: First solo was in Primary. When we, the program started out you go to the regular Air Corps basic, then we went to college. We went to Mississippi State College. We did, the group that I was in anyway. But they had what they called "college training detachments" and there was one at Milwaukee State Teachers College I know because

my wife was a student there. But they had them all over the country. That was supposed to be a five month course.

Mark: In what?

Cook: And it was, it was supposed to be equivalent to a year and a half of college. It was, it covered that kind of territory. We started out with mathematics, we started out with 2+2 and wound up with spherical trigonometry.

Mark: Wow.

Cook: Not only that but we only had four months of it. The physics course was pretty fast treatment. The professor that was teaching the physics course on Fridays would leaf through the book and tell us what he was going to cover in the succeeding week and one day he got to Bernoulli's theorem and he said, "We're going to discuss Bernoulli's theorem." He said, "To you guys it's probably the most important thing there is because that's what holds the airplane up." He said, "We'll try to spend a few minutes on it." And that was kind of the rate that the whole thing was done at. We were supposed to have an English course, which we didn't have. And we had a history course. We had a lot of physical training and we had civil air regulations, of course. Let's see, we had mathematics, physics, history, civil air regulations. I think that's the main territory we covered.

Mark: Yeah. Pretty intensive.

Cook: Yeah. And then from there we went to Pre-flight school. And from Pre-flight you went to Primary Flying school, and Basic Flying school, and Advanced Flying school. And if you made it, you made it.

Mark: And you did.

Cook: Yeah. While I was at Mississippi State, the program up to that point in the Aviation Cadet part of the program was commenced at Pre-flight, was a nine week cycle. In other words, you had nine weeks of Pre-flight, and nine weeks of Primary, and nine weeks of Basic, and nine weeks of Advanced. But during the 1944, early '44, they extended the program into a ten week cycle so that we had ten weeks of Pre-flight, and ten weeks of Primary, and ten weeks of Basic, and ten weeks of Advanced. While we were in Primary, they extended it again just for, they added five weeks to wherever you happened to be, whatever part of the course you happened to be in, you got five more weeks of it.

Mark: Huh, that's strange.

Cook: So I was in Primary at the time and that was a good place to be because that's where you learned to fly. When we, Pre-flight arrangement was that we had five weeks

where we were, had classes seven days a week, and at the end of the five weeks we had a Sunday off but we couldn't leave the base. And after that we had every eighth day off and we could go into San Antonio. That was about as far as we could get. That was, we would, I guess we could leave at about 10:00 in the morning and had to be back by 9:00 that night but they always contrived it so that we didn't really get off the base until about noon. They always had some kind of a training thing that we had to do. It was a pretty strenuous course and there was, again, a lot of physical training. And we qualified there with a .45 pistol and that was the total firearms experience that we had except that we shot skeet and we had to shoot 25 rounds of skeet a month, if I remember rightly, even after I was graduated. That was primarily for combat kind of flying and particular for single engine.

Mark: So, flying a plane. I'm interested in your thoughts as you learned how to fly. It's something I've never done but something I'd be interested in doing. I'm interested in some of the personal reaction to flying. I mean, was it a thrill for you?

Cook: It was very exhilarating. And it was, I considered it to be quite an accomplishment, too. I darn near washed out in Primary. The first time that I, well, when we were at college we had eight hours of dual instruction in Cub-type airplanes but we were never soloed there. We just went up with an instructor and we did exercises and there was no graduation. But in Primary, the instructor that I had, after some explanation, but we just got in the airplane and he had me to take it off. I don't know whether you're familiar with a Stearman or not.

Mark: No, uh-uh.

Cook: It's an open-cockpit airplane. It has a 220 horse power engine, radial engine, and there's a lot of torque and I didn't really know how to deal with that and when you open the throttle, why, you've got a tendency for the airplane to veer to the left. And the reason that they had us flying Stearmans was because they're very difficult to handle on the ground and the next phase that we were going to be in in Basic Flying school was to fly AT-6s, which is an advanced trainer that is also pretty tricky on the ground and so they wanted to get us used to it before we didn't know any better. So I had difficulty with that and I got into such a condition that the instructor took over the controls before we ever even got off the ground. In the course of that, why, we dragged the wing tip and it scuffed the fabric on the wing tip and this was really not very, he wasn't very pleased with that. So as a result he never had enough confidence in me to have me solo in the amount of time that they normally expected people to solo in. Then what I had to do is have a ride with the squadron commander, and it was called an "elimination ride," and I went ahead, and there were some of the other guys that had to have this and they had washed out but I inquired around to see what this squadron was really looking for and so I knew what to expect and I made sure that I did everything that he was looking for. So we got back on the ground, he took the airplane off and then let me fly it after we got up in the air and he landed it again when we got back and he said, "Well," he said, "you're flying is mechanical but

you're trying hard." And he said, "We'll get you another instructor and give you a few more hours." and of course that was all that it took, a different instructor really. So we went over to an auxiliary field one day and the instructor said to me he was going to get out of the airplane before I killed both of us. Then he had me solo and fly around and make landings and as I say, it was a very exhilarating experience. Once I got past that hurdle, everything was fine.

Mark: So, if you would just walk me through the steps between your flying training and going overseas then.

Cook: All right. After, I went to multi-engine flying school after Basic Flying, and we had B-25s for our multi-engine experience, and after I graduated I was assigned to a pilot pool at Brooks Field in San Antonio, and the war was still going on, this was in May of '45, and so at San Antonio at Brooks Field we had some B-25s and some AT-7s which is a civilian model 18 Beachcraft, two engine airplane. The AT-7 is a navigation trainer. That's what we had to fly mostly. The requirement, for pay purposes, was you had to fly four hours a month or three hours and ten landings so we usually did that. And toward, I guess, when they started the point system for people to get out of the Army most of the enlisted men that were maintaining airplanes were, had, their point requirement was not the same as ours was and so they, a lot of them went home. So we had to do the minor work on the airplanes—refueling, and oil adding, and pre-flying the airplanes, and that sort of thing—so I got to be, initially I thought I was being told that I was the engineering officer. In other words, I was in charge of our group as far as getting the servicing done that we had to do. I was looking through some of my records here the other day and it turns out I was a flight leader. Anyway, we did that. They came around looking for some people to go into air traffic control and everything that I had signed said that I was in for the duration plus six months and they weren't about to declare the duration at that time so I figured I might as well do something else, learn something else, so I interviewed the man from the air traffic control school and wound up doing that. And that was at Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls, Texas. And upon completion of that course, there were 21 of us that got strung out over the Pacific, from Hamilton Field to Japan. We were supposed to establish airways over the Pacific. They took an airplane load of us as far as Hickam Field in Hawaii and then we were reassigned from there and just got orders to get to where we were going to go on our own. I went to Manila. We were in what was called the Army Airways Communication System because they had all the radios and they ran control towers and all that sort of thing. It was 141st Army Airway Communication System squadron and they had been through the thick of the Pacific war from Australia on up and had some pretty interesting experiences. They many times landed before the Marines did staking out airfields and that sort of thing. Anyway, ...

Mark: Now, ...

Cook: Go ahead.

- Mark: Now, you're going the opposite way of most guys. Am I right? You're going out to the Pacific while a lot of guys are starting to come home.
- Cook: Yeah.
- Mark: Did that seem ironic to you at the time?
- Cook: No, no. It was something I committed myself to and I just did it.
- Mark: So, in the post war period then, what sort of duties did you do? I mean, you weren't going onto the beach before the Marines like your predecessors had done.
- Cook: No, no. In Manila I was detached from the main squadron out to a swamp outside of Manila. It was a radio receiver site; it was an AACS facility. Their call letters were WUQM. But anyway, we built air traffic control center there and at the time it was the largest air traffic control center in the world, including anything that was stateside. About that time the enlisted men that were supposed to work with us all went home so we didn't have enough man power to operate as a control center so we initiated what we called a "flight following service" and people would file flight plans and we'd just keep track of them. One case, one night there was an airplane that was, left Guam and I was keeping track of it and about midnight he was supposed to be in the Philippines and we got no arrival report from him. So I checked with his point of departure and they said he had left. I checked with his destination and they said he hadn't come, hadn't arrived so I called Air/Sea Rescue and I said, I couldn't tell them to do anything but this is what I know. I went to bed and a little while later our detachment commander called me to see him in his office and he said, "How would you like to pay for so many hours of B-24 time and so many hours of PBYP time?" and all this. And I said, "Why?" and he said, "Well, Air/Sea Rescue went out looking for these guys and they were at their destination." Fortunately all our communication with point of origin and the destination were on teletype and to I had all these teletype messages and I just went and got those and I put them on his desk and I said, "What would you do?" and that was the end of it. That was the kind of thing that we were doing.
- Mark: And you stayed there, geez, how long?
- Cook: Just for two months.
- Mark: Yeah. And then you came back home?
- Cook: No, no.
- Mark: Oh, Okinawa here.

Cook: Our squadron was spread all over in the western Pacific. And so we had a detachment up in Okinawa and they needed help up there so several of us went up to Okinawa and got further detached

[End of Side A, Tape 1]

from the detachment. Some of us went down to run the control tower and the ground control approach radar in Naha, Okinawa. I chose to work in the ground control approach. It was an interesting kind of an experience.

Mark: How's that?

Cook: Well, radar was pretty primitive still in those days. The system was, constantly needed attention and there was supposed to be a crew of 21 people to run this thing, and there were 3 of us, and only 1 was an electronics man so he was constantly trouble-shooting and repairing. I learned to check tubes so that I could help him a little bit 'cause he was all alone on the job and we operated the facility. We were available 24 hours a day. We operated for practice purposes every morning and we spent the afternoon fixing the thing 'cause we couldn't go away and leave it inoperable. It was, well, we finally got another pilot, there were two of us that were pilots, then there was this one electronics guy, and he, well, when we finally got another pilot and so then one of us could take off and go and fly, make GCA approaches. We had a C-45 which was the same thing as a model 18 Beachcraft that I had experience with, the AT-7; C-45 was just another version of it. So we'd go out and fly and make GCA approaches and one day, we would do it when the field was closed and we were the ones that closed the field. And one day I was out making GCA approaches and my friend called me on the radio and he said, "You better make this the last run." So I did and I taxied over to the set and got out and went inside and there's a, the design of the thing was that there were two systems that were parallel systems. One was on standby and the other one was the one that you were operating with. And they had, all the components were in drawers like in a trailer and they had all the drawers pulled out and they were patched cables running all over the place. That thing was just about totally dead. So if I had insisted on continuing to fly, I wouldn't have had any GCA to get me down. But it was, and we also had the radio range, responsibility for the radio range and that's the old fashioned beam and we used to go out and check that to see that it was pointed the right way and operating. So that's sort of what I did in Okinawa.

Mark: Now, in the Philippines and in Okinawa, I assume this is the first time that you've been overseas.

Cook: Yes.

Mark: As you mentioned, when you were in training, you didn't get an opportunity to go off the post much, or the base, or whatever it was called at that time. Did you get that

opportunity when you went overseas? I mean, were you working so hard that you didn't get a chance to get off the base at all? If you did, what did you see?

Cook: Well, we, in the Philippines, after I was an officer, why, it was a different ball game. 'Cause when I was in the pilot pool in San Antonio, why, I could go into San Antonio or go anywhere I wanted to go within time limitations, at my own desire. I didn't have to have a pass or anything like that. In Okinawa there wasn't much of a place to go.

Mark: Yeah, I would imagine it would be pretty battle-devastated there.

Cook: It was. There wasn't hardly anything in the southern half of the island that was more than about two feet high. So there was a lot of devastation to look at. They had a little railroad line there, two little railroad lines. One ran transverse across the island and the other ran along the length of the island. They were little, tiny, narrow gauge trains and the locomotives had been tipped over and destroyed and all the buildings were leveled. The port, you could almost walk around in the port, walk on the water so to speak, on the hulks of ships that had been sunk in the harbor. There was an Okinawan museum that was a typical Okinawan house that we could go and visit and look over but we were not supposed to have any communication with the natives.

Mark: And was that the case? Was that followed?

Cook: Pretty well. The only exception that I had was we had Okinawan girls that would take care of our quarters—make the beds, and sweep the floors, and do that kind of household chores—and because they would come in after everyone went to work in the morning and then they would leave before everyone was done working in the afternoon but my hours were not that structured, 'cause we were on 24 hour call, and so I knew the girl that took care of my quarters and she had been educated in a mission school, missionary school of some kind and she could speak English. Most of them couldn't. So I could talk to her and learned a little bit about what it was like. And one time there was a typhoon that was supposed to come out, had done quite a bit of damage in the Philippines, and it was coming up our way and so we were putting sandbags around everything and tying the roofs onto our quarters. The girls were around and they were giggling and having a big time about it and I asked her what they were giggling about and she said, "Oh, they call you the American typhoon army." But that was about the extent of the Okinawans that I knew.

Mark: How about Manila?

Cook: Well, Manila was a little different in that we had workers in the radio station that were running the teletypes and other communications equipment that were Filipinos and so we could, I knew some of them. In fact, one of my friends had a good friend who was a Filipino rice farmer who, when we were on our way home, had us to his house for dinner. He was a pretty well-to-do person. He lived across the road from

what was their presidential palace at the time and had gardens around his house, that sort of thing. The other thing was that our, in Manila, our radio station was on land that belonged to a Filipino so the Army rented the land, and he would come around every once in a while and entertain us. He would hire a band or something and have a parade down the only street in the area, and that sort of thing. Then there was another person, a Chinese, that owned, oh, he had been, I guess, in the motion picture business, and he owned the land where our transmitter was, which was on the other side of Manila, and he had an estate over there that he had used as a location for some of the movies that he made, and he had a big swimming pool and we could go over there and swim in his swimming pool. And then we could tourist around in the Manila area so it was a little more, not structured as it was in Okinawa.

Mark: And so you returned from overseas duty then, when? 194 ...

Cook: 1945, in October.

Mark: Of '46.

Cook: September of '46.

Mark: Yeah. And how long was it until you got out of the service finally?

Cook: When I came back, I was on the way out. I was on the way out of the service. Got back to Fort Sheridan, and I was married by that time. We were married in October of '45 and my wife, Janet, lived in West Allis with her parents. As soon as I got back, why, I got to Fort Sheridan, why, I took off and went to Milwaukee and went back to Fort Sheridan the next day I guess and processed out. And of course being processed out, I had the opportunity to continue on in the Air Reserve and they offered me a promotion to boot so I did it. Subsequent to that, we had a Volunteer Air Reserve squadron in Milwaukee that we met actually in the Museum, Milwaukee Museum. We had enough people that had the time and inclination and we agitated enough so they made arrangements for us to have half a dozen AT-6s and a couple of AT-11s, which is another version of this Model 18 Beachcraft, assigned to Milwaukee from Orchard Place Airport in Chicago area. And Orchard Place Airport is now called O'Hare.

Mark: ORD, that's right. I knew that, actually.

Cook: Yeah. So anyway, we had half a dozen airplanes and we had a crew chief that maintained them, and a regular Army major I think it was that was in charge of the operation, and we did all the work getting our headquarters established down there at Mitchell Field in Milwaukee. In other words, initially that was Milwaukee County Airport but it became Mitchell Field. We dug ditches and got the plumbing in and all that. But we had the airplanes anyway so we tried to maintain our proficiency that way. It was before they started paying people for being in the Reserve for any

activities but it was still a good thing to be doing. At that time I was enrolled at the University of Wisconsin and I was just at the University, in Milwaukee, for one semester and half of a double-speed Chemistry course in summer school, and I was working full-time in a machine shop in Milwaukee.

Mark: Sounds pretty hectic. Sounds like a lot of work.

Cook: Well, ...

Cook: ... in the middle of town, on State Street. Why, this was while I was in this double-speed chemistry course. What it was was to get a year of chemistry in summer school because the university classes, in order to cope with the large enrollment that they had, they had detachments of the university all over town, in various public schools and all around. And I was initially was at the West Allis Vocational School and they sent faculty people out there to teach the courses but they couldn't teach chemistry and so in order to catch up I had enrolled in this double-speed course in summer school.

Mark: Now, is a discharged soldier now, or airman, whatever the case may be, you had the GI Bill. Did you use it when you went?

Cook: Yes, yes. That was an important factor.

Mark: Was it? Did it help cover most of your expenses?

Cook: Yes.

Mark: When you were in school.

Cook: Yeah.

Mark: Now, when you were at the Milwaukee college there and then when you later went to Madison ...

Cook: Madison.

Mark: ... uhm, I assume you were one of many veterans on campus.

Cook: That's right, that's right. And they were pretty highly motivated. We, at Madison of course, there was a single man, mostly men, yeah, it was mostly men, accommodations out at Truax Field and then there was also at Camp Randall there was a trailer camp.

Mark: Right.

- Cook: And the other facility was at Badger Village.
- Mark: Right. Up in Baraboo.
- Cook: Yeah. Well, it's half way between Sauk City and Baraboo.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Cook: That, up there, you know, that was the rocket powder plant in World War II and the housing was all temporary. In fact, when we were out there here a couple of weeks ago, it's all gone now except for what we called the "community building" and the school building. There was an elementary school because there were married veteran students out, were the residents there.
- Mark: Right.
- Cook: And so there were a lot of elementary school ...
- Mark: Lots of kids there.
- Cook: ... kids, yeah.
- Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask you what life was like in the Badger Village. I mean, it's a lot of veterans, close quarters, a lot of kids running around. I'm just interested if you would describe sort of what it was like to be there.
- Cook: Well, it was, my wife said one time that it was a great experience but she didn't want to do it again.
- Mark: Why was that?
- Cook: But the structures were built to house workers in the rocket powder plant and they were temporary, their design life was something like five years and it had already expired by the time we were there. The university operated school buses back and forth between Badger Village and the campus and I guess the fare was something like \$.10 a trip.
- Mark: It's not a bad trip but I imagine in the winter it's fairly hectic at times.
- Cook: And school buses were not that well heated. So when it got down 49 below zero, there one time, and you know Wisconsin, you get 30 below zero not too infrequently. And these structures were row-type buildings. Where the, the so called South Badger was where the couples with children lived and these were stove heated and they were, the buildings were constructed by driving posts in the ground and then laying a floor structure on top of the posts and the floor was a sheet of 5/8 inch plywood so there

was not any insulation between you and the ground. And the walls were constructed of a layer of celletex and a layer of sheet rock.

Mark: Yeah, it doesn't sound too warm or sturdy.

Cook: Well, it wasn't intended to be. And the plumbing was, well, there was a space of about 9 or 10 inches between the underside of the floor and the ground so all the plumbing was exposed for 9 or 10 inches and the showers. There was a shower stall in the bathroom, with a concrete base and a sheet iron, had sheet iron wall, and we would put salt down the drain to keep the drain from freezing in the wintertime and sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't. One day Janet was taking a shower and the drain was frozen, and I had made some duct board so she didn't have to stand on the concrete base, so she didn't realize it but that had filled up and was overflowing and I was on the other side of the wall, in the kitchen doing something underneath the sink, and the water came running across the floor. I had an electric drill there and I drilled holes in the floor to let the water out. Anyone that could manage used an oil stove to heat instead of the coal stoves that came with the place. The day that I installed the oil stove that we had was the day that it was 49 below zero. Got it all hooked up, the oil drum was outside, it was just a 55 gallon drum with a copper pipe coming out of it and into the house, and the oil was so congealed that it wouldn't flow through the pipes. I finally got it flowing and the pipe had frost on it, about 3 or 4 feet into the house before it melted so that was pretty cool.

Mark: Yeah. Sounds like pretty rustic living up there.

Cook: Pardon.

Mark: Sounds like pretty rustic living up there.

Cook: Yeah. Well, the cooking was designed to use, utilize a coal burning or wood burning iron range. You know one of those things with covers on the top and you build the fire inside and do your cooking on top of the range. And that was initially the way that was supposed to provide the hot water. And there was a hot water tank that was installed up near the ceiling in the bathroom and some of the earlier students had, or maybe even earlier residents, had taken electric hot plates and strapped them to the underside of these hot water tanks so they had electric hot water. And the University, fortunately, realized what was happening and so they wired the places for more power and put in immersion heaters in the hot water tanks so that we had electric hot water in a more safe and useable mode. But the ranges, I don't know of anyone that used the range for cooking. We used electric hot plates. We get two burner electric hot plates and then to augment that we also had an electric roaster so we could roast things and make bread and that sort of thing. So it was sort of primitive.

Mark: I suspect you were glad to finally graduate and get out of there, huh?

Cook: Yup, that's true. I had an opportunity to do some graduate work but we had just about enough of going to school.

Mark: Now, as I look over this sheet you gave me, I notice you did several jobs there while you were in school; bus driver for awhile and you worked in the physics lab. Were these things you needed to do to support you and your wife? Did the GI Bill not cover all your expenses? Or was this something that you wanted to do to stay busy?

Cook: I was in engineering. I didn't have to worry about having something to keep busy. Actually, the bus driving part was sort of gravy in that I had to make the trip anyway so I figured I might just as well get paid for it, and so I did. But the thing was that, I guess the best example of what was going on is that the Red Cross used to come out with the blood mobile and I was talking to one of the nurses at the blood mobile one day and she said that Badger was the place where they had to reject the most people as far as blood donations was concerned because they were anemic. So, you couldn't really have what you needed just on the GI Bill. And even though the university was, in a way was kind of subsidizing us in that the rental of these units at Badger was based on what our income was. In other words, a sliding scale. So it was not expensive living there but in order to really make things work most everyone had something else that they did, some way of having more income.

Mark: I see. Now, you were there a little bit later than a lot of the veterans with whom I've spoken. I'm wondering if, at the time you were there, Badger Village started to get a little smaller? Did you notice that perhaps there weren't as many veterans on campus as there had been when you first got there? Or did the stream of veterans on campus stay pretty steady?

Cook: It was probably pretty uniform. There were about 17,000 students at the university at the time that I was there. That was a lot. We were still having, some of the engineering courses were still in temporary buildings and that sort of thing. Next to the mechanical building there was some temporary structures that were classrooms.

Mark: Okay. So you finished school and then it's time of course to go find work. And you eventually found work out there in Pittsfield.

Cook: Right.

Mark: Now, one of the problems veterans sometimes have after a war is there's a glut in the job market; there are a lot of people looking for jobs and sometimes there's trouble finding work. Did you have any trouble finding the position you eventually landed?

Cook: No. Part of it was the fact that I had a delay. I had gone through the, well, I didn't have any trouble getting a job in Milwaukee. When I had applied to get into the university in 1946 I was notified that I could start in in January of '47 at the extension in Milwaukee. But I didn't know that. I thought it was going to be awhile so I went

to work at Nordberg in Milwaukee as a machine operator and I didn't have any trouble getting a job there. In fact, I told them that I had applied to get into school and that whenever I got into school I was going to stop working at Nordberg and that didn't bother them at all. So it was only, I only worked there for, through November and December.

Mark: Yeah, it wasn't long at all.

Cook: Then subsequently when I, after I'd finished the first semester and got into the double-speed chemistry course I needed some income, some additional income and I went down to the Wisconsin State Employment office ...

Mark: In the capitol somewhere?

Cook: No, no, in Milwaukee.

Mark: Oh, in Milwaukee. I'm sorry.

Cook: Give me a minute, I'll tell you a little bit more about it. I dug out some of this stuff. Ah, let's see, what does it say? It's, I got what is called an Applicant Identification Card for Veterans, Department of Labor, United State Employment Service. They, I told them what my qualifications were and what I wanted to do and they connected me up with a job shop, machine shop, Charles Schott Machine Company. I don't think they're even in business anymore but they were down sort of on the southeast side of Milwaukee and I would work there from 6:00 in the morning until 2:00 and from 2:00 I'd go over to the university and the chemistry class ran from about maybe about 3:00 until 10:00 at night, then I'd take the streetcar back to West Allis; so I did all my chemistry homework on the streetcar. So I didn't have any trouble getting work there. And then when I had completed the first half of this double-speed chemistry course, my father had a business that he and I had talked about while I was going into the Army and he had a partner that went bad on him so he needed help so I withdrew from school. And fortunately I had completed the first half of the chemistry course so I got credit for it. For a couple of years I worked with him in Rockford, Illinois. Then we were making tools for Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward and toward the end of the couple of years we had difficulty in getting materials. This was one of the difficulties at the end of World War II was getting materials for things and we needed steel that was made to our specifications and we had to pay in advance for it before they'd make it and all that so we couldn't afford it, couldn't tie up the money 'cause it would take material that was supposed to be delivered in February was delivered in October, the following October, and so we were, we couldn't survive. And so I had decided that if something like that came up, why, I was going back to school and I was not going to be lured back out of school until I finished. And so, consequently, it was 1952 before I was graduated from the university. By that time things had sort of stabilized. In fact, we were in the Korean War.

Mark: Yeah.

Cook: And I had, when I got back into school I withdrew from the active Air Reserve so I was no longer, I had been out of it for about a year. Our Air Reserve squadron was supposed to be a very heavy bombardment squadron. Was supposed to get a B-29 and all that stuff in Milwaukee, and we never got it but these guys were activated and within just a few weeks of the time that they were activated some of them were dead. And this was the period where the Air Reserve was pretty bitter about, the treatment that they got, and they called themselves the "Christmas help." It was because our level of training was not up to what was needed for combat purposes at that time. So they were really put under, into difficult situation. So anyway, ...

Mark: Yeah. You missed out of it.

Cook: ... I was no longer in the Air Reserve so I didn't participate in that.

Mark: Uh hum. So, after you finished college you found work. Did you have trouble finding a house? There were housing shortages after the war. Again, you're a little later than the other veterans but I'm wondering if you had trouble finding a place to live? Or adequate place to live?

Cook: Well, when I was, had gone to work with my father, that was difficult situation. I was in Rockford, Illinois and my wife was in, and son, were in Milwaukee with her parents and I was staying with my parents. It took us quite a long time before we were able to get a place in Rockford. It happened to be a friend of mine from when I was a kid that was moving and he and his wife moved out and we moved in. That was the only time that we really had difficulty getting a place. When I finished school and came out here I, one of the things that I asked them to do at GE was to find me a place to live so they did.

Mark: Yeah. That wasn't a problem for you then?

Cook: No.

Mark: Okay. I've got just one last area that I want to cover and that involves veteran's organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. Did you ever join any of the major groups like the VFW, the American Legion, or anything like that? And if so, when?

Cook: Well, I joined the American Legion for probably a year or so.

Mark: Uh hum. Was this right after the war or was it later?

Cook: Yeah, it was right after the war. It was partly because prior to the war I was, I had played in the band and orchestra in school and there was an American Legion, there were American Legion bands around at the various legion posts in Milwaukee and so

the group that I had been with was, I played in their band and the father of one of my good friends was a member of this legion post so I kind of joined, not because I really needed to or anything but he encouraged me to. I never was active with it.

Mark: As you got on in life then, did you ever rejoin these groups?

Cook: No.

Mark: Okay.

Cook: No. I also joined the Air Force Association at one time. That was kind of interesting because their publications were, had articles that were of interest to me.

Mark: Now, as for reunions, have you ever attended a reunion of people you served with?

Cook: No.

Mark: Is that because you don't know of any? Or is there ...

Cook: Well, I shouldn't exactly say that. One time one of the men that had been in training, in the Primary Basic Flying school, called me up and he lived in Minnesota and he was just trying to locate people and so he, every Sunday, he'd get telephone numbers and call people and see if they were the ones that he knew and he came across me. And so we were going out, my parents lived in, outside of Milwaukee at the time, and we were going out there. It so happened that he was going to be in Milwaukee at the same time and so we got together there. But that's really the only time.

Mark: Well, those are all the questions that I had. Is there anything you think that I've skipped over or forgotten or anything you'd like to add?

Cook: Well, as far as friends are concerned, when I was in, at college, at Mississippi State, in fact it was this friend whose father was the American Legionnaire, showed up but he was in the class that followed mine. So he was at Mississippi State and he and I had been very good friends from the time we were in elementary school so we had quite a get together then. The other case was in Okinawa. The Air Force had designed a post war program with the intent of having a nucleus of rated personnel in case of further hostilities. And the way that they did it was to get rid of all the people who just had ground kind of specialties and took pilots and bombardiers and navigators and made them do administrative kind of work and in order to maintain our proficiency the program was designed to require ten hours, an average of ten hours a month in any three month period, of flying experience. And that ten hours was to consist of navigation-type flying, night flying, and instrument flying, and just local take-off and landing kind of flying. In Okinawa there was not much we could do to navigate 'cause you'd get up high enough and you could see the whole works anyway and so the operations officer had the responsibility of making sure that we met these

requirements. And so he would send us out, we had a C-46 that we used for this purpose, and we'd go down to the Philippines or we'd go over to China or up to Japan or whatever. And I got on one of these flights to Shanghai and the, we had to leave very early in the morning because the weather was such that visibility was not very good at a more reasonable hour so we left at about 5:00 in the morning. And the group that flew the plane, the crew for the airplane were all just a pick-up crew, whoever was assigned to do it, and so we, the first time we saw one another was when we were getting our weather briefing in the morning and the, after we finished that, why, we were walking out to the airplane and the navigator was walking along with me and he said, "You know, I know you from someplace." And we thought about it and reviewed all the places that we'd been in training and none of those meshed, and so it turned out that we had gone to high school together. So there were coincidences like that.

Mark: Yeah. It can be a small world sometimes.

Cook: Yup.

Mark: Okay. Well, I thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I really appreciate it. Do you have any ...

Cook: Observation so far as disposal of material.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Cook: Okinawa was going to be a jumping off place for an invasion of Japan and so just as fast as they secured some space in Okinawa, by the way, Okinawa was only half

[End of Side B, Tape 1]

secured when I was there. There were still Japanese around the hills that were fighting the war. But anyway, as soon as there was secure place at all, why, they brought in material and piled it up on the beaches in big boxes. Anything you can imagine was in those boxes. And they brought in some people from Kelly Field who were warehousing experts and they built big buildings along the airstrip at Naha and then they started sorting all this stuff out and inventorying it and anything that had a little rust spot on it or something like that, why, they just threw it away. And so there were piles of material that would otherwise be perfectly good that were disposed of. In fact, a lot of equipment they burned and our radio range station, we couldn't get repair parts for it and the people up in Japan were using Japanese radio range equipment because they couldn't get American equipment and yet they had this big fire that they were burning all this stuff on and among other things was a brand new radio range transmitter. So a couple of us climbed in and got on top of the fire and chiseled off parts of it to use for spare parts for our transmitter. And down in the motor pool there was a man there with big stack of aerial camera lenses and he was

taking them and putting them on a block and hitting the lens with a hammer and throwing it away. And they had a jeep engine, it was a brand new jeep engine that they dismantled and defaced all the bearing surfaces and just destroyed the engine. They did an awful lot of that.

Mark: And what did you think of all that?

Cook: I thought very poorly of it. But I guess this was, the intention was that they didn't want to flood the market with all this stuff over here so they didn't.

Mark: Did you get to take home any souvenirs by some chance? I know a lot of guys did.

Cook: I got a Japanese rifle. They had a room full of these things and we were invited to go in and pick one up so I had that but otherwise not particularly. I got stuff that I bought, embroidery and stuff like that that I got in the Philippines and over in China, but not much.

Mark: Okay. Well, again I thank you for talking, it's been quite awhile now.

Cook: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah, it's been two hours almost. I really appreciate it. These interviews are all eventually going to be ...

[TAPE ENDED]