

**Interviewee:** Cooper, Don  
**Interviewer:** Robin Sellers  
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(The interview is often interrupted by what sounds like the tones that buttons on the phone make when putting in a phone number – this blocks out the speaker when it occurs)

**Sellers:** Mr. Cooper, are you aware that we are tape-recording this interview?

**Cooper:** Yes ma'am, I am.

**Sellers:** And do we have your permission to do that?

**Cooper:** You do.

**Sellers:** Why don't we start out by you telling me something about where you were born and where you grew up.

**Cooper:** Well, I was born right here where I still am [laughs]. I'm looking out on the same patch of woods I learned to walk in - it's De Borgia, Montana. A little, tiny, nothing town on the very western edge of Montana, right in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, in timber country. My dad was a logger and I grew up to be a logger and went direct from the logging campsite into the service during the war, and then came back to the logging camps after the war was over and still live here. It's a pretty place to live. Tough place to make a living, kind of, but you know, when I was born we were so broke here we didn't even know there was a depression. I mean, it was just kind of normal [laughs].

**Sellers:** Well, if you didn't have stocks and you didn't lose money, it was hard to tell. You had to be really wealthy to have it affect you.

**Cooper:** This didn't bother us, I'll tell you, this being really wealthy. But it is a pretty place to live and it still is timbered, thanks to conservation, although forest fires ... the 1910 fire hurt us badly here, of course. I wasn't around for that, but the effects of it have been here.

**Sellers:** When did you graduate from high school?

**Cooper:** I graduated in a little town fifteen miles away, St. Regis, Montana, in, I think, 1941.

**Sellers:** Oh, just in time. What good timing.

**Cooper:** For the war? Absolutely perfect. I think they planned it that way [laughs].

**Sellers:** Did they draft you or did you enlist?

**Cooper:** No, I was drafted. I went to work in the logging camps but I was drafted fairly early, as soon as I arrived. I don't know what the age was, but I know that when I reached it ... and of course, I signed up with the draft board and then I was drafted into the military, yes.

**Sellers:** Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

**Cooper:** Yes, I do. I'd gone to round up ... we had a little logging outfit, my brother Dennis and I, and a little sawmill. It had been a weekend, and our loggers go to town. And when they go to town, they celebrate the 4th of July - I don't care if it's the middle of January [laughs].

**Sellers:** You probably only have three days of summer.

**Cooper:** That's about it. So I was in town rounding my crew up for the Monday morning, getting them back to camp. And the crew was, like, four or five men - we're talking a very small operation. But very good men. At any rate, the talk in the bar was all about the war ... and actually, it hadn't started and I don't even remember the date. But I do know that as a young man at that time, in good health and all, that it was certainly going to personally affect me. It could hardly help it. Millions of us knew the same thing for the same reasons, of course. But that was the first I heard ... well, that was Pearl Harbor, wasn't it?

**Sellers:** Yes, okay. Had there been some talk amongst you and your buddies about, "Gee, it's coming - what should we do" or anything like that?

**Cooper:** Well, there had been, all right, but I don't think any of us took it that seriously. We still had veterans of World War I that were still around, you know; they were older. But they had told these stories about how terrible war is and how we should never even consider settling an argument that way again and everything. So we didn't really think. But then when the damage of Pearl Harbor began to come out, we realized that we were probably going to be very personally involved, all the young guys did. And by all, it was only a few; we were a very rural area then and still are.

**Sellers:** So you were drafted into Uncle Sam's Army?

**Cooper:** Yes. And I went to ... I think the actual drafting process probably ... I think I took the step forward down in Superior - that's our county seat about thirty miles away. But possibly that was Missoula. I don't clearly remember, but I do know we went to Ft. Douglas down by Salt Lake, I think it is. That's where I actually was sworn into the service.

**Sellers:** What did your folks think about that? Were you an only child?

**Cooper:** No, I had a brother, older brother, who was similarly affected, all right. They were terrible upset; my mother was terribly upset. I feel sorry for women during wars because they are just broken-hearted. Now, men love their children, too, and they don't want to see them go to war, nor do they want to go themselves - I certainly didn't. But there's something about a women sending her child. And I can see, too, now that I've had two of my own and watched them grow up - that must have been a terrible thing because there's a darn good chance you'll never see them again.

**Sellers:** Yeah, I know. My husband missed Vietnam by a couple of years so I'm of that generation.

**Cooper:** When it really gets down to a personal matter, you can see how important it is. It just takes your entire concentration.

**Sellers:** Oh yeah. Okay, so you were being trained. Did you know right away that you were going to be a foot soldier?

**Cooper:** Yes, I was pretty sure of it, anyway. I went to Camp Roberts, which is a training area in California, and I trained there. One of the first things they do is give you an intelligence test, and I knew right then I was going to be in the trenches [laughs].

**Sellers:** You weren't going to a rocket scientist, huh?

**Cooper:** I was going to be a foot soldier, yes [laughs]. But you know, when it comes right down to it, that's who does an awfully lot of the fighting in the wars, the guys that are out there in the thing. I think we had maybe ... I think it was maybe twenty-one weeks of training there, and it was very active and it was a very abrupt lifestyle change for many people. It wasn't, however, for a Montana lumberjack who was used to getting up at five o'clock and getting the crew out there and getting them going and going with them. So the physical part didn't hit that much, but there were other aspects of it - the regimentation and all that goes with military life.

**Sellers:** Did you have barracks or were you in tents?

**Cooper:** We had barracks, Camp Roberts had barracks - big, two-story ugly buildings but very practical. They took in all these men, people out of the office buildings and banks and out of the cotton fields and out of the wheat fields of Montana, and put them all together there and made it work. I have to say that about the Army; by golly, they did. We all had different lifestyles and different backgrounds and different mentalities but we were for a common cause.

**Sellers:** You were there, you said, for twenty-one weeks?

**Cooper:** I think it was twenty-one weeks, yes. Then a wonderful thing happened, and I really commend them for this and it must have been tough - they gave us two weeks at home. We got to come back and see our families. And for a lot of them, as I look back, as awful as it is to say, it was the final two weeks they would have, too. By the time I got into it, a lot of the war

had ... a lot of the flamboyant things were over, and by flamboyant I mean the spectacular, the terrible bombings and all of this. A lot of it came down just to war. And war is hell. There's nothing glamorous about it. But I did ... and I fought mostly in the Philippines, that was what they called the Southern Philippines Campaign. I was in the 24th Division and the 21st Infantry Regiment. I was an infantryman.

**Sellers:** When did you leave California?

**Cooper:** I left California ... you know, I'm sorry I don't have these dates better, but ....

**Sellers:** It doesn't have to be ... well, I mean was it '44, '43 ....?

**Cooper:** No, it would have been ... I should've written that down and I didn't. (1943)

**Sellers:** Well, let's not worry about it then.

**Cooper:** I tell you, from the time I was drafted until I left California was about ... probably five months, something like that. Once we got through with the Camp Roberts ... that's where the training was. It was tough training, too, including it ended with a twenty-mile march and all of that ... and the ones that were still there then, they got to go home for two weeks and then they went directly overseas. We didn't even go back to Camp Roberts, we just went to ... I shipped out of Seattle, I think it was.

**Sellers:** Do you remember the ship's name?

**Cooper:** No, I don't. I'm not even sure I knew what it was when I was on it [laughs]. But it was a troop carrier, obviously, and stacked in there five high, which doesn't give you much room, you know? [laughs]

**Sellers:** Tell me how a logger from Montana does on the high seas?

**Cooper:** I hate to tell you this - I'm a mess. I get seasick in the bathtub if there's a little earthquake [laughs]. I just do. I still do, although there's cures for it now. But on that trip, it wasn't a major problem because there was nothing to do for us on the ship anyway. So I spent a lot of time down on the bunk. I don't remember much of the trip over because we had such a different world when we landed. We landed in hostile country, you know, and then just that quick your whole world changes.

**Sellers:** Where did you land?

**Cooper:** We landed on the island ... I'm not sure of the first place we touched, but the place that we then went to fight was the island of Mindinao. It's the big island, the southernmost island of the Philippine group. It's a large island and the main city on it is a city named Davao. Davao became a word with us, an expression we would use, because we were trying to retake Davao (which had been taken, as we understood it, and held by the Japanese) and was a

main port of entry (seaport) for the troops and the ammunition and all the things that they were needing to fight the war. So it was a very important thing that we take it. That was our objective, to take Devow. So that's where we landed.

**Sellers:** Okay. How did you land? Did you go off your ship and onto LSTs or something like that?

**Cooper:** We switched onto a landing craft, but not the crafts that necessarily go ashore. What we went across on was more or less like an ocean liner. And then we pulled into a harbor there somewhere and were met by the troop carriers. They carried, I suppose, 1,000 - 2,000 men ... maybe not that much, but anyway, they were a much bigger ship. Then we went in with them and then we got into the smaller ... actually, landing boats, and went ashore. But the going ashore was not that bad. We were under some fire, but not as bad as anything like some of the landings that were made. That was not our worst part of the war, getting on the beach.

**Sellers:** Once you got on the beach, what were you met with?

**Cooper:** Then that's when the trouble started. I will say this - the Philippine Islands were a tough campaign because they're very mountainous (at least Mindinao), more so than the land I'm looking out at right now, western Montana and the Bitterroot Mountains. But the mountains of Mindinao were at least as big and steep, very steep. But, they were covered with a forest, and it's not a forest ... you can't walk through this forest. It's a jungle; it's all tied together. So the land itself was a formidable enemy as we started in. The thing it did, it made roads impossible. We never had any roads because of the nature of the land. So, it precluded using a lot of the machinery in which we excelled over the enemy. In other words, Army tanks were out. I never saw an Army tank in the war until it was in a parade afterwards ... or self-propelled weaponry or any of that. Even the movement of troops was tougher. But I mean, the heavy armor ... and of course, this is where we really excelled. But the biggest place that it hurt us was from the air. Because of a curtain over our head of jungle, you couldn't even see the sky. We could have told there was a plane up there, but the pilot couldn't have told who was on the ground beneath him. They didn't dare strafe or bomb ... we were like head to head for months after this. So the Japanese did have a break there; the country was far more slanted to their type of warfare than ours. But we did ... we had to change, of course, and adapt to the area, and we did. That's how it went, then, for a year, I guess. I think we fought there for 18+ months.

**Sellers:** It seemed like that.

**Cooper:** It seems like that. Maybe it wasn't, but it seemed an awful long time, I remember that [laughs].

**Sellers:** What was it like on a day-to-day basis?

**Cooper:** Well, what you'd do is you dug a foxhole every night. If you're advancing, you abandoned it every morning. Your food came up ... everything was carried in; there were no wheels, now, or no air-drops or anything else. But the thing is, the worst thing about this was

getting the wounded out. Starting out, I was a light machine gunner; that's the machine gun that's semi-portable, and a rifleman. Basically, I was what they called a rifleman. But one day the captain came over to me and we'd kind of gotten to know each other, our group, a little bit ... he knew my name anyway ... "Cooper," he said, "I'm going to transfer you and put you in the medical corps." He said, "We can't operate a litter in the jungle on these steep mountain sides with this heavy growth; it's so thick you can't get through it with a litter." He said, "The only way they can do it is carry them out on their back." He said, "You're a big, husky young man," and I was - I was 6'4" and weighed 212 then and I was strong. I couldn't help but think, when he showed me how to do it, I almost said, "I've done the same thing to get my logging crew out of the bars back in De Borgia, back into the woods." [laughs] I knew all about carrying a guy on your back. It is a great way to carry - the guy lays on your back and then he puts his arms around your neck and then you reach down and he brings up his knees and you carry him like that. Also, if you have to, you can hit the ground (and many times we did) when the enemy opened fire (and they're firing as low as they can). He flattens out on you and you're still very low-profile, right? At times I've gone a few feet to a little bit of cover just on my elbows; I just pull him with my elbows and the wounded man hanging on. The reason that I got transferred ... it was all the infantry in the same thing ... but from a rifleman to what they call a combat medic, was simply that I was able to carry heavier loads than the average man out there ... carry it through the forest without a litter. The ground was just too steep and too compacted with jungle to operate in.

**Sellers:** So by virtue of your size, you had a new MOS.

**Cooper:** Absolutely. That is well put - by virtue of my size. That was really the reason that I was chosen, I'm sure.

**Sellers:** Well, that's not too bad. It got you out of some other duties, probably.

**Cooper:** That was all right, you bet it was. Let's face it, too - it's a total switch from trying to kill somebody to trying to save somebody.

**Sellers:** Yes, and that's probably good for your morale.

**Cooper:** It's good for anybody's morale. I don't care - Jack the Ripper would have appreciated it [laughs]. You may say you don't, and they're so-and-so and so-and-so's, but they're humans too, you know. And of course, the ones you're trying to save are your own buddies. But that's why I made the switch, and then I stayed in that until the war was over.

**Sellers:** Do you recall when you left that particular island? You stayed there the whole time?

**Cooper:** The entire time until the end of the war. We were in foxholes the night we heard that peace had been declared. It was in there, too ... I was wounded then in that process, but I wasn't wounded bad enough that I had to be taken out, and I didn't go back out. But I brought a guy in and I was wounded on the way in with him. I knew that there was another guy out there

right where he had been and I was sure he'd been hit, too, and I started to go back out. Our CO was a doctor, a medical doctor, at home, and he said, "Coop, you got something there we should look at." I had been banged up a little on the left side of my head. As a result, I've been blind in my left eye, totally blind.

**Sellers:** Well, that was certainly a Purple Heart qualification.

**Cooper:** Well, I did get the Purple Heart, but I also got the Bronze Star because I did go back out for the guy. Now, believe me, medals didn't mean diddley-squat to the guys that were out there at that time. Surviving is what the whole thing was, surviving and helping others do that, and winning the darn war. What we wanted to do was get home. What I wanted to do was see the very scene I'm looking at right now out the window. I wanted to see home. Everybody over there wanted that same thing. A lot of them weren't making it, you know. A lot of them never made it. But that's how come I got to be ... and I went up and I came out ... I was a tech sergeant, which is a five-striper, you know. It was good for somebody who had never gone through officer's school. But that was how come I got the Bronze Star. I have a nice plaque on the wall here that says that. I literally took the medal and put it on one edge of the plaque and then I took the Purple Heart and put it on the other. That's the only sign of the war we have, but I do have it up in the living room and I'm proud of it.

**Sellers:** Well, you should be proud of it - that's right. Were you writing to anybody while you were over there?

**Cooper:** I was writing to my brother Dennis ... would be about the only one. And my dad; my dad was still alive. My mom was gone, and I remember over in the foxholes I'd be praying and I remember thanking God for the fact that Mom was gone, because she remembered the other war and the horrible thing it was to lose your child would have been. I don't know how she would have withstood this one. But she had been killed by lightning right here in De Borgia not too long before the war. But mail call was a big deal, and I had a little girlfriend from high school who wrote to me [laughs]. Nothing ever came of it; she married some other joker and I'm afraid they're very happy [laughs]. But mail call was a highlight. It could also, if you didn't get a letter ... and there were guys that I was with for well over a year that never got a letter, I don't think. I've often wondered who back home would do that. You know, it would only take you fifteen minutes to write them a letter and at least they'd have something to go up and get and their name would be called.

**Sellers:** How did the mail get to you? Was it fairly frequent?

**Cooper:** Better than you would possibly believe. I don't know, I've seen us be under fire for hours and just almost flattened on the ground and then somebody would come round and say, "Mail call," you know [laughs]. I've seen them come round crawling and say there's mail call. Very important, and they realized it, didn't they? Word from home. And of course, that's who we were fighting for, too. I mean, it made sense. But there were several things about the Army that I ... and I'm not an Army or military-minded person, but I will say that they did some wonderful things. One, was just getting the mail to you. But the other was we ate pretty darn

well. Now we ate a lot of the same stuff, and K-rations has been a joke for years, but they kept us going and we never were hungry. The Japanese soldier ... and they honestly were not getting ... I don't know what they were eating, sometimes. They were worse off than we were towards the end. Towards the beginning, they had the supplies and we didn't. But towards the end of the war it was pretty pitiful, it really was. I admired our ... I forget the department that supplied you with the food ....

**Sellers:** Was it the quartermaster?

**Cooper:** Quartermaster, yes - that's right. I salute them, and they did a magnificent job under absolutely very adverse conditions, really did.

**Sellers:** Were you in contact \_\_\_\_\_[??] [phone interference] ...

**Cooper:** I think we're in contact with Mars [laughs].

**Sellers:** That could be. Were you in contact on almost a person-to-person basis with the enemy, or was it at a distance?

**Cooper:** Ours was very close because the jungle was so thick we couldn't see. We really didn't know there was an enemy there until, for the most part, they opened fire. Because we were the ones that had to advance. They weren't trying to take it; they were just trying to hold the land. They were trying to keep us out of the city of Davao, which would mean if we could take Davao that would cut off their supplies and we could literally starve them to death, I guess - that's just my conjecture. But I know that's what we were trying to take and they told us that.

But we rarely saw the enemy in the jungle. You'd see where you moved. It made it a bad war, and like I say, all our tanks ... the biggest thing was the airplanes that come down in more open areas and strafe and you'd see them dropping fire bombs and all of that. None of that - there wasn't a plane dropped ... [phone interference]

**Sellers:** When did you learn about the atomic bombs being dropped?

**Cooper:** I remember hearing about it very well, and we were, as we always were, it seemed, either in combat or on the edge of it. We couldn't believe what we were hearing, though, because we heard different rumors at different times. One time we heard the war was over and we were all ... and that was then another six months before that. But I remember the night but I can't tell you where I was because I didn't really know at the time. An awfully lot of time you didn't know. I was somewhere in the Philippine Islands, yes, on Mindinao.

**Sellers:** You were accruing points, I'm sure, right and left?

**Cooper:** Accruing get out time?

**Sellers:** Get out-type points.

**Cooper:** Yes. And there was some advantage to having been in combat all that time, but I don't know just how they figured that. I wasn't married, however, and that counted as points against ... you know, they gave you ... as they should have - it must have been hell. Pardon me, but it must have been terrible to have been married and in there. I used to worry about that. If you had a wife somewhere and she was worried and the ... oh boy. I didn't have that worry.

**Sellers:** When did you actually get started towards the States again? How did it happen that you got out of the Philippines and back home? What was that progression?

**Cooper:** Boy, we are fading out.

[interviewed is halted and phone connection re-established]

**Sellers:** Okay, so we were about at the point where the war was technically over and you were going to come back to the States. Tell me how that happened.

**Cooper:** Well, when the war was over ... and you asked me where we were when we heard about the bomb. This was an emotional ... I suppose one of the world's most emotional moments. People realized, if we understood right, that this was going to end the war. And in effect, it did, too. It did change and I don't know if there was any shooting that went on after that at all because our commander told us, "Hold your fire. Hold your fire." We were dug in right out in the foxholes at the time that happened and it came over some sort of telephone that they had out there, the one they carried with them. That's how we got the news.

Then we went to Japan, and the name of the city was Okayama, and it was a big military base. We were there for quite a while as the peace was worked out. But, excuse me, now I'm afraid I've forgotten the question.

**Sellers:** I wanted to know what happened after the bombs were dropped and you've told me that part up to you went into Japan. Were you part of the early occupation then?

**Cooper:** Yes, we were the first troops in and the first troops that many of the Japanese had ever seen, Americans like that. And, in our case, the first time we'd ever seen the civilian Japanese. It was a nice city ... a city, I guess, of half a million, so by any standards a large city. Modern, but it was a long-time standing Japanese military base. So we just took over the barracks that the Japanese soldiers had had. This probably took a matter of a couple of three weeks. I don't know just how ... but we came down out of the jungle mountains of Mindinao after that, very shortly after the bomb, and then shipped out there on the beach and went directly to the Japanese home islands, as I recall. But there was no hostility that I recall. They had worried about events of somebody throwing a bomb into us after the war was over or something - there was none of that in our organization.

**Sellers:** So the Japanese were fairly docile?

**Cooper:** They were docile, and under the circumstances they showed a lot of class. They actually do have a lot of class. We knew them in the war at an extremely poor time ... our first

contact with the Japanese was a very negative situation. But over there, I thought they carried on ... you got to realize how would it have been if it had been reversed and they'd been moving in over here.

**Sellers:** Sure. We would not have been very polite, I'm sure.

**Cooper:** I'm sure we wouldn't have been. But I will say this for our troops, too - we had a few braggadocios, the ones that were always at the very back of the operation in the war were always in the front after that, but that was normal [laughs]. But our troops did behave well; I was proud of them. Really, because of course, we were terribly interested in one thing - going home, you know?

**Sellers:** Yes. The quicker we can get out of here, the quicker we can get home. How soon did you start getting towards home?

**Cooper:** Well, it wasn't that quickly. It was several months, actually. But when you think of the astronomical problem they had, just the logistics of the millions of men scattered on islands all across the South Pacific and elsewhere around the world ... all this stuff to be set back to normal. I think they did a tremendous job. But it was ... and we stayed right in that camp ... nice facilities, good mess hall, fine food. We all had duties. In a medical detachment, by that time, I was what amounts to a 1st sergeant. I took care of the books and everything; it was a tech sergeant rating in the medical .... So I had duties, and I was glad I did because it gave me something to do. The facilities were good and the people were good and I think everybody, even the Japanese, were just saying, "Thank God this thing is over." Because they had been under a terrible stress for years. And Okayama was never bombed. Everybody that lived there must have realized if this keeps going ... they all knew about the other disasters over there, you know? And they must have said it was just a matter of time until our number comes up. But where do you go? How do you get away safe? No, they were greatly relieved, really.

**Sellers:** So you started home, then, on a ship?

**Cooper:** Yes. We came home on board a ship to ... I think San Francisco [is where] we landed. We were actually kind of floating in the air, I think [laughs]. All of us had dreamed ... and there were times during the combat when we just thought the odds are too much against us. You can't be here ... if you're here long enough, you know ... we were in combat for almost a year straight, it seems. I may be wrong on those figures, but it was a long, long time. Day-to-day, it was just part of our lives. And then suddenly you're coming home, right? Fantastic.

**Sellers:** Now that takes a lot of decompression, doesn't it?

**Cooper:** It did. And that's a good word, too, because it was quite a bit of compression when you're up at the end of that filter [???]. It went remarkably well; I don't see how they handled it all. We did have ... morning reveille? I've even forgotten the names. We did get together as a unit a couple times a day, which was good; it kept some law and order. But we ate well, we went on tours of the country or just walking tours downtown. They didn't want us

going down into the heart of Okayama. Actually, the nearest village was a place called Kurashekee, but we could go anywhere we wanted in Kurashekee and we did. I don't know ... honestly, Robin, I don't know of one bad incident. I'm sure there were; there would be that many if it had been just a single nation involved. I'm sure there were individuals, but there was very little in my men. And I knew them by now ... everybody on a first-name basis in the medical detachment. As a tech sergeant ... there is a top non-comm and your commander is not a military man; he's a doctor. So a lot of the military things fell to me, which was fine. They were simple enough. We got together in the morning and had reveille and raised the flag and at night we took it down with a little ceremony. It was good, it was all right.

**Sellers:** So you were kind of settled into a routine and that was probably comforting after what you'd been through.

**Cooper:** It was, because the war was anything but routine. Even though we were doing the same thing each day, it never got routine because different things happened. But here there was a routine. And also, you had every reason to believe that you were going to be around to see the sunrise. And you know something about war, where you're seeing men killed everyday? You began to accept it as part of your future. You really do. There were times I would wake up at night and lay there and think, "I wonder when my number ..." (that's what we called it) ... when your number comes up. And when it did, a lot of these guys, too ... there wasn't anything they were doing right or wrong. I mean, they were just there and the enemy shelled the area ... and they were just shelling at abandon, too, in the jungles, because they couldn't see what they were hitting. But they did have a pretty good idea of where we were, too [laughs]. Better than we did with them, I think, but maybe not.

**Sellers:** You were maybe on foreign territory (no pun intended) and they had been there longer and were more familiar with the islands and the terrain.

**Cooper:** That's absolutely true.

**Sellers:** So you came back into San Francisco. This is probably what, early '46?

**Cooper:** Early '46, I would think, yes.

**Sellers:** From there, how soon were you released?

**Cooper:** I was released ... actually, then, I went from San Francisco up to just out of Seattle, a military base there. It isn't Ft. Lewis, is it?

**Sellers:** Yes. Well, Ft. Lewis is in Washington, so it must be right out of Seattle.

**Cooper:** I think that's the one - Ft. Lewis. We were there a very short time, but that's when my brother came and my family ... Mom was gone by now, but she had been before I left, too. But there's where my brother came and my brother and I were always very close, so this was a great moment. He had given up ever seeing me again, you know. But a great moment for thousands. I would watch these people and they would just get a hold of each other and cling.

**Sellers:** Had your brother been in the service?

**Cooper:** No, he didn't go. Dennis had a medical problem. He was up to the draft board several times but never passed the medical ....

**Sellers:** It was probably good for your father's sanity.

**Cooper:** I think it was. They at least had each other, they did.

**Sellers:** So you were back and you quickly got back to Montana?

**Cooper:** Right smack where'd I'd come from, Robin [laughs].

**Sellers:** Did you take advantage in any way of the GI Bill or any of the other things that the government offered you?

**Cooper:** Yes, I did. Not in all of them but in many of them. One I took advantage ... I went to a photography school in New York - New York Institute of Photography ... and took up cine and the movies and began making travelogues. I still worked in the logging camps and I have great respect for loggers, but I also know that it's a young man's job and you grow old more quickly there - it's terribly physical, you know. And also, the element of the danger, which sounds crazy coming out of the infantry [laughs] ... worried about getting killed logging.

**Sellers:** Well, probably what kept you healthy was recognizing that there was an element of danger.

**Cooper:** I think so. In most cases I think one flatters the other. But at any rate ... so I started that, and then I got into making, through a series of good fortunes (blessings, I feel they were) ... into making travel films of different countries ... and then they sold as videos all around and it went very well. I did that ... well, I'm still selling them, but for thirty-five, forty years, I was active in producing them on different parts of the world. So, in a way I came out of the war, I went into the photography and that's what I'm still in. I've retired, but I ....

**Sellers:** Were you interested in photography and film-making before the war, or was this something that was a result of your war experience?

**Cooper:** I think it was a result of the war. I'd never ... no, my mom had a little Kodak. It took great pictures, which I treasure now, of course, all of them, but there was no talent involved. But, this is a cine ... the VHS is a moving picture, actually; it's a tape you play and people buy the cassette. You personally narrate it, and I had a certain talent there that I didn't realize I'd had. They went well and it was a great career and I'm happy because it spread a few laughs around the country and also a certain amount of knowledge. I made films on different parts of the world that I was particularly interested in. I'd spent a lot of time in Alaska, so I made one on Alaska and different areas.

**Sellers:** Did you ever go back to the Philippines to make any?

**Cooper:** I never did. I must tell you the truth - I have very mixed emotions about going back. Where I went in the Philippines, and where my memories are and where I really, I mean, hugged the earth and prayed to God that I'd live the next half hour, is still a jungle. Mindinao is still a jungle, so I'm told. But, you know, all that fighting for the city of Davao, to protect it ... we never saw it [laughs]. I mean, even when we left, I thought well, we're going to Davao to catch this ship or something, and it didn't happen. But it came through, and I think it came through pretty well because I don't think they bombed it. Sometimes they bombed the cities so bad, we did, to get it back, that it was hardly worth getting back.

**Sellers:** Ah, yes - the old Vietnam ... "We had to destroy it to save it."

**Cooper:** That's well-put - you have to destroy it to save it.

**Sellers:** Is there anything else you'd like to add to the tape?

**Cooper:** Only that this has been a pleasure and I ... believe me, I know I talk too much about it, but I don't go around in the bars and talk ... most of the people don't even know what I did in the war, the people here at home.

**Sellers:** Well, we'll change that soon, won't we?

**Cooper:** They really don't. It just isn't anything you discuss. But I'm glad to kind of make a record of some of it because it was such a very different part of my life and it was such a typical life for many my age at that time. And I'm speaking as one that came out of high school right smack into the fray. There were hundreds of thousands of us that had a very similar adventure I would think, wouldn't you?

**Sellers:** Oh, yes, absolutely.

**Cooper:** I was just one of the crowd out there and you never even knew where you were going to be sent. In fact, you didn't know where you were after you got there until it kind of leaked out. They didn't say, "We're going to go to the Philippines."

**Sellers:** And the whole time it didn't really matter.

**Cooper:** That's right [laughs]. It didn't matter, anyway. But they were very cautious about word getting out, and all honor and glory to the military - they prevailed and we won the war, right?

End

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