George A. Cooke Jr. ’69
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[DAVID J.]
MANNES: This is David [J.] Mannes, and today is May 7th, 2016, and I am here with George [A.] Cooke [Jr.] on a phone interview. And how are you today?

COOKE: I’m very well, thank you. And yourself?

MANNES: I’m doing fabulous. So I want to start this interview off way back in the beginning and possibly, actually, a little bit before the beginning. So could we start with just talking a little bit about your parents: where they’re from, their backgrounds?

COOKE: I’d be happy to do that. My father is of Russian background. His family came to the United States around the turn of the last century. My grandfather and his family were clerics. My grandfather came to the United States as a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church. He was indeed a civil servant. The Russian Orthodox Church at that point was actually a branch of the tsarist government.

At the end of the First World War [World War I], as you’re probably aware, the Russian Revolution radically changed the political situation in Russia, with the result that my paternal grandparents’ expectations of at some point returning to Russia ended. My father’s family was liquidated by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War in the early 1920s, and as a result had a very strong feeling of anti-communism in their—in their background.

My mother was born in Bremen, Germany, in the 1920s. My maternal grandparents came to the United States in 1926 as a result of the disarray in the German economy, the hyperinflation and the collapse of the currency. My grandfather, my maternal grandfather was a German officer in the First World War, spent three years in the trenches, was wounded several times and highly decorated, so it was a martial history on my mother’s side of the family.

My father, who was a painter and a commercial artist, served in the United States Army from 1940 to 1945, so also experience in the military on that side of my family.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: I can go into more detail, or other aspects that are—

MANNES: No, that's—that's—that's perfect. And what kind of work did they both do?

COOKE: My—my—my father was trained as a commercial artist at Pratt Institute in New York, but graduated in 1929, just in time for the crash [the Great Depression], so in the end became an art teacher for many years in the New York City school system while still practicing various aspects of his artistic calling.

My mother graduated from high school at the age of 14 in 1940 and immediately began working as a model, both an artist's model and a runway model in New York City. Subsequently, she worked in a number of different capacities, primarily in the fashion industry. She ran the showroom for many years for one of the leading fur industry manufacturers in the Garment District in New York.

Her real love in life, however, was archaeology. As an adult, she went back to school and obtained her bachelor's degree, you know, in her 50s with a major in archaeology and ancient history.

MANNES: Okay, wonderful.

So I have this—I might be jumping a little bit forward here, but I have this background in your family now, of your—your father—your father's side comes from Russia, cleric background and so strongly anti-communism because of what happened there. And your mother came from Germany. As well, Germany also had very strong anti-communist feelings at the time as well. So this kind of builds up to what's coming up, I guess.

But right from there, we'll segue into *your* childhood, so can you tell me when and where you were born?

COOKE: I was born on October 23rd, 1947, in Brooklyn, New York. We raised in and around New York City, initially in Queens, in Middle Village, until I was seven years old. When I was seven years old, along with many of their contemporaries, my parents moved from New York City out to Long Island, where I grew up. Effectively was educated in a working-class neighborhood on the south shore of Long Island, called Uniondale.

MANNES: Uniondale. Okay.

So can you tell me a little bit about what the neighborhoods were like, first growing up till you were seven in Queens and then a little bit about Long Island?

COOKE: Sure. Obviously, the more recent memories are clearer, but—

MANNES: Of course, yeah.

COOKE: —in terms of—yeah, in terms of Middle Village, which is located in Queens, it's a somewhat insular community that at that time still had some rural aspects to it. We lived in a house with my grandparents, where, you know, there was a raspberry—raspberries growing. There were still some farms in Queens at that point. It was before it was greatly developed. It was primarily a working-class neighborhood, once again. Most of my friends' parents at that point had not been to college., They typical family in the area, you know, would have been a policeman, a fireman, you know, a union worker.

I was, you know,—my education began in the New York City school system, at P.S. 128 [The Lorraine Tuzzo, Juniper Valley Elementary School], which at that point—you know, a working-class community, an integrated community, although mostly of, I would say, middle European ethnic background.

When I—when my parents moved out to Long Island, we were, you know, a part of a huge wave of migration of working-class families from the city out to Long Island, the sort of post-war baby boom generation. We lived in a small

tract house in a community that was, again, primarily working-class, very heavily ethnic in its—in its origins.

Very strong presence of the Catholic Church. We lived on a street that was down the road from the Catholic Church, and Masses went from six in the morning until four in the afternoon. The ethnic composition of the neighborhood was primarily Irish, Italian and Polish. There was a small, you know, group of, you know, original settlers who went back to the Dutch that had colonized Long Island in the 17th century.

There was also a—a black community that was part of Uniondale that had been in that area since [American] Civil War era, so it was a very well-established, working-class black community, and a very small, you know, presence of, you know, Jewish families, mostly, you know, from Central Europe, a lot of Russian and Polish folks of Jewish religion.

MANNES: Right. Okay.

And so growing up, which schools did you attend? You mentioned one—I can't remember the name—T.S. [sic] 28, you said?

COOKE: Public School 128 in Queens, New York.

MANNES: Public School 128.

COOKE: Then I attended a local elementary school for second and third grade, Cedar Street School. After third grade, I moved to a—what would also be a grammar school. In those days, they ran from—run up to sixth grade, so from the fourth to sixth grade I was at California Avenue School. Then I went to what was then called the junior high school, the equivalent of what today would be a middle school, called Lawrence Road Junior High School [now Lawrence Road Middle School]. And then my ninth—actually, my 10th, 11th and 12th years were spent at Uniondale High School, which at that point was a thoroughly new organization. It had been founded in 1955. I graduated in the tenth year class, in 1965.

Previously, our community was part of the larger town to our west, which was called Hempstead, and still is, Hempstead, Long Island.

MANNES: Gotcha.

And so these are the schools you attended, and we spoke a bit about your neighborhood. So what—what events shaped your childhood, growing up? Whether it was from the neighborhood, how that kind of impacted you, your family backgrounds, the schools, themselves—what would you say kind of you grew up doing?

COOKE: Well, it's a broad question, but I'll try to take a cut at it. You know, I guess, a view to the particular piece of history that you're interested in. I think along with many of my contemporaries, I—I grew up in—in a context of the—of the Cold War. One of my earliest memories is of seeing troops returning from the Korean War. This would have been 1953.

And I grew up in a—in a community and in an age cohort in which the vast majority of our parents had, in one way or another, been directly affected by the Second World War [World War II]. And there was, you know, a sense, I think a pervading sense, during the 1950s of American's postwar position in the world, of the—at that point, the bi-polar nature of the world. The events of the late 1940s and early 1950s, you know, played a very large role in people's vision of the world as being essentially an east and west division between the democracies in the west and at that point what was perceived to be the growing threat of, you know, the communist bloc, which covered most of eastern Europe, and China.

During the early—I guess the late 1950s, another very strong influence on my generation, especially the young men in my generation, was the advent of the—you know, the development of the arms race, in which the United States and the Soviet Union and then eventually Communist China had each acquired nuclear weapons, had been involved in a series of proxy wars, whether these occurred, you know, in Asia or in Africa or in the western hemisphere.

In 1957 I think probably the seminal event for the 1950s was the Russian launching of the Sputnik [1] satellite, which suddenly placed the United States and individuals in the United States in a situation in which the Russians had the

capability of launching an intercontinental nuclear missile that could land in your neighborhood. And I think that the presence of that threat was—was pervasive.

I grew up in a situation in which—well, this is now mocked today—you know, there were periodic drills at the local elementary schools, in which you would literally go to the halls, put your head against the wall, in anticipation of a nuclear blast.

MANNES: The "duck and cover."

COOKE: Right, "duck and cover." And this led—this sort of reached, I guess, its fever pitch in the early 1960s, and I guess probably, again, a—a—a point in history that you're likely to be familiar with, the Cuban Missile Crisis.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: I—I remember my—my father packing sandbags in our basement and putting away food and water in anticipation of a nuclear attack. I remember seeing—and, yeah, at this point I'm in my—in my early teens.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: I remember seeing trucks rolling through the streets, on the main drag in Uniondale, moving troops to Florida. At that point, our community was adjacent to an Air Force base, which was extremely busy with troop movements. So there was a real sense of impending doom, I think probably more felt by my parents than by me and my contemporaries, but it was certainly a world in which there was an imminent threat of conflagration.

And I think that certainly provided, you know, the sort of political context in which I grew up. I think it's interesting that, you know, contrary to more, you know, current trends, there was a very strong hawkish element in both political parties, you know, during the largest proportion of the '50s. Dwight [D.] Eisenhower was president, and, of course, he was a general and had been very much involved in the Second World War.

Interestingly enough, in the 1960 presidential election, one of the major elements of John F. Kennedy's campaign was his promise to end the so-called "missile gap," a perceived advantage of the Soviet Union over the United States in terms of, you know, the space program and the ability to deliver nuclear weapons through intercontinental ballistic missiles.

So it was a very, you know, charged period in which there was a—a sense, certainly among young men in the working classes, that the country was threatened, that we, as our fathers had, would have an obligation to, you know, if necessary, fight to defend the country.

It was also a period in which there was the draft, and every young male, when they reached the age of I think it was actually 17, had to register with the draft, and a large portion of, you know, each cohort of graduating high school seniors, at least the young men, would go into the military.

And I think here it's important, at least in terms of my own experience, to look at this from a perspective of class. You know, I grew up in a working-class community, and I think the sense in the working-class community was essentially that one had an obligation to serve. The vast majority of working-class young men did serve. That was I think in fairly—in fairly strong contrast to the experience you would have had in an upper-class community, where essentially your parents weren't union laborers but were in a professional capacity or had a certain degree of, you know, economic comfort. I think it was easier for that—for those folks to go to college.

There were exemptions for the draft if you were in college, and there were also ways in which one could avoid the draft if one had the necessary financial support. There were always ways out if you had money, not unlike the situation in the Civil War, when you could essentially buy your way out of the draft.

And so I think there were also significant class differences in—in that regard, although certainly, you know, part of my experience growing up was having an older cousin, whom I idealized—idolized, who had gone through Yale [University]

on a [U.S.] Navy scholarship and become a naval officer. So I had sort of a—a model in my mind about a certain kind of route out of the working-class environment through service in the military. So that was, you know, part of the world that I lived in and part of the sensibility I had with regard to the role of the military in society and also America's role in a bi-polar world, in which the threat of nuclear war was omnipresent.

MANNES: Right. Wow. So that's—that's a lot of stuff. I want to go back to a few things in there. Speaking about—you spoke a lot about the society and the societal sort of pressure and direction and the neighborhood as well, but can you tell me a little bit more about, like, you, personally, and your family? Within your household, what kind of pressures were there—were there pressures there to serve in the military? What was - as you got older, how did you speak within your household about the Cold War?

COOKE: Well, as I indicated, you know, earlier in our conversation, as essentially an accident of my background and based upon my father's ethnicity and the ethnicity of his family, there was a very strong feeling of anti-communism in our family. We had had—essentially my father's family in Russia were liquidated in the 1920s, and that was a very powerful sense of history that was part of our family and also part of the Russian ethnic community that we were—you know, that we lived within.

I was brought up in the Russian Orthodox Church, and it was, at that time, as it has become again today, you know, primarily a church that served an immigrant community that had, you know, a similar perspective. There was a huge, you know, flow of immigrants from eastern Europe, you know, during the course of the 20th century, and a—a large portion of those, especially my—my grandparents on my father's side, contemporaries—most of them had left Russia as a result of the end of the First World War and the Bolshevik putsch and revolution, which resulted in a highly polarized society and one in which, you know, essentially under [Leon] Trotsky, during the civil war in Russia and afterwards, there were liquidations of entire classes within what became the Soviet Union.

And I think that was a very strong imprint in terms of the—of the world view I had. And, you know, essentially it shaped, within my family, what would be—essentially be a political attitude, which was one in which there was very little sympathy for, you know, the old Left. And I think that was, you know, part of what grew up in. My—my father was, you know, very anti-communist. He had had the experience during the Second World War of working with Russian prisoners of war that had been taken prisoner towards the end of the Second World War—

And I don't know how familiar you are with the history of the Second World War in the east, but there were entire armies that were fighting for the Soviet Union that essentially went over to the side of the Nazis because they were so strongly anti-communist. And many of these—what—what—what—Russian soldiers who ended up fighting for the Germans were then captured by the Americans during the final months of the war and were brought to prison camps in the United States.

My father was a Russian speaker, and he acted as an interpreter among these prisoners of war, and part of the stories that I heard when I was a kid were, you know, his experience with those soldiers who had essentially—you know, from the Soviet perspective—betrayed their country being forcefully repatriated to the Soviet Union, and they were all killed. [Laughs.] Right? So essentially there was—there was a sense of, you know, I guess polarity and also a sense that, you know, there were complex issues in the political situation that resulted in untoward, you know, experiences for certain people of my—my ethnic background on my father's side.

For my mother's side of the family—again, in terms of, you know, personal context—my grandfather had the experience of, you know, coming through the First World War wounded and then, you know, with the collapse of the—of the German army in 1918, returning from France, where he had been in the trenches for three years, to a political situation in Germany in which there was civil war, and there were—there was a very powerful, you know, communist revolution that went on in Germany that resulted in street fighting throughout the early 1920s, and essentially the breakdown

of civil government within Germany and the establishment of, you know, Soviet or—or—or communal governments in a number of German cities and, again, periods of violent confrontation between returning veterans from the front and essentially, you know, communist agitators, and there was street fighting.

So my grandfather had gone through this experience in the early '20s of being a veteran, of being assaulted in the streets by communist activists because he was still in uniform, and then watching how that eventually settled into the—into the Weimar [Republic] government.

And also he had the experience of watching the nascent period of National Socialism [Nazism] in Germany and all the issues that that raised, so there was a sense, I think, more in my family than in others, of, you know, European history and central European history placed within the context of the nuclear arms race, the Cuban Missile Crisis—you know, a sense of anxiety and risk.

I think another significant element, certainly for anyone my age, was the assassination of President Kennedy, in which there were all kinds of unresolved issues as to how that had really occurred. I think there's still debate about that today. But certainly, you know, the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald had essentially been in Russia for a number of years raised all kinds of suspicions about what was going on.

It was also the tail end of the [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy era, in which there was a very strong polarization in American politics between, you know, the left and the right. And this permeated lots of social discussions.

So it was a period in which, you know, politics had a different kind of seriousness. I think we really haven't experienced that recently until, you know, the post-9/11 [2001 attacks] world, in which there was a sense of imminent threat, you know, to the average American in his home.

MANNES: Right. Yeah.

So you had this strong background in the area, and obviously your family had very strong opinions in a certain

direction. Was there pressure on you or did you feel the need, from that background, to serve in the military? You spoke about your older cousin, who went to Yale and ended up serving as well. Was that something that was kind of all around your family? Did a lot of your family end up serving?

COOKE: Well, you know, I'm an only child, so I would say that certainly it—there was an expectation—and, again, I think this was primarily something that existed within the working-class community—that young men would serve in one capacity or another. I was never pressured into looking at the military as a career, nor was their a particular pressure from my—my parents for me to, you know, join the Navy in the way that I did.

You know, my father was a fairly—you know, a fairly sophisticated fellow in terms of his—his understanding of the world. He spent five years in the Army, and, you know, he had a lot of ambivalent feelings about the military, you know. And, again, it was—it was just not so much within the context of my immediate family but in the context of our community, and in the way young men were—and boys were socialized. What you did as a young boy was you played war. You put on, you know, your dad's old campaign cap or his, you know, set of World War II fatigues. All young men—at least within my, you know, age group and peer group, you know, had toy guns, and you would get together with a bunch of your friends and go to the local woods and play war. It was just part of the way you were socialized.

And I think, you know, one example of that is probably, you know, in the—in the motion picture, you know, *Born on the Fourth of July*. You'd see the Tom Cruise character as a young boy, growing up on Long Island, in the same context that I did. You know, that was part of the way you were socialized, is that, you know, the image of masculine—the masculine role model included military service because it was part of the world you lived in, and it was seen as a necessity to protect, you know, your—your particular way of life. It was a very—

It was a period in which people were very much more—very patriotic. You know, people—you know, there were flags everywhere on the Fourth of July. From a young age, you

were, you know, in some ways directed into what might be considered the paramilitary organizations of the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts [of America]. And, you know, I had been a Cub Scout, and I was a Boy Scout, you know, through my first couple of years in high school. You wore a uniform. You know, the Boy Scouts had begun, you know, in the—in England during the period of the [Second] Boer War essentially as a—as a pre-military, you know, organization in which young men would learn to wear a uniform, to handle weapons, to live outdoors, to march. So there was a—there was a very strong, you know, feeling within the—within my peer group of young men that military service was a part of the world that you were living in and part of the role that you would play as a young man.

I think there was a sense, a very strong sense of citizen soldiers. There was a feeling that everyone would serve in the military as part of your citizenship. So it was a very different atmosphere than today and certainly isn't an experience that my children have had.

MANNES: Right, yeah. And would you—so you've mentioned the—the societal, like, the working-class background. Was this—also, was this idea of the citizen soldier, the military service—was that institutionalized in the education system you went through at all?

COOKE: Well, I think—I think to some degree it was. Certainly, you know, this was the pre- —you know [chuckles], [Howard] Zinn era in—in the teaching of American history. And American history was, you know, in many ways taught as, you know, a series of armed struggles that created the nation. You know, you—you went back to the—you know, the foundations of the United States in the [American] Revolutionary War. The notion of citizen soldiers, to some degree the idealization of George Washington. We were certainly taught, as part of the New York State educational system in public schools, about the history of the Revolutionary War and all the, you know, wars that followed it. I think that an awful lot of history—well, an awful lot of American history was taught in terms of armed conflict, and armed conflict in creating the nation, both in its inception and then in terms of the acquisition of territory.

Certainly with regard to the [American] Civil War, you have to, again, put this back into context—when I was in, you know, elementary school and junior high school, it was the 100th anniversary of the Civil War, and that was taught with a great deal of intensity, and it was all about service, whether it was for the North or the South.

So I think there was an expectation. There was a pattern and there was a set of, you know, realities. You got your draft card at a certain age. You were classified based upon your physical capabilities. And there was an expectation that at some point or another, you would engage in public service. And I think it was very much a—an element of the identification of the male role in society, that you were going to be responsible, at some point, for, you know, potentially taking up arms and defending your country.

COOKE: Wonderful.

So that brings us to your decision to go to Dartmouth College. Can you speak a bit about that, just how you chose, out of all the places across this country, to come to a little, small school up here in the North?

COOKE: Well, I would, again, sort of relate it back to the experience I had with my cousin. Again, as an only child, he was essentially a big brother figure for me. And I remember when he was at Yale, you know, talking to him about his educational experience, about what Yale meant, and about, you know, college, at an early stage in my life.

And one of the things he mentioned to me was that, you know—he said if he hadn't gotten to Yale, he would have gone to Dartmouth. He thought Dartmouth was the kind of place where I might be happy. And that concept of Dartmouth as a place where I would feel comfortable and which also would offer a fine education was something that was reinforced as I entered my—my teen years, my early years in high school.

I happened to have, you know, become acquainted with some men and women, young men and women who were somewhat older than I was, and they talked about school, and Dartmouth was always one of the schools that had been

mentioned as a potential good place to go, especially for someone who was an athlete, someone who liked the out of doors, and Dartmouth was also identified as, interestingly enough, one of the more conservative environments within the—within the Ivy League. It was rural rather than urban. It had a very strong tradition of military involvement. Certainly, the 10th Mountain [Division]—I mean, that's part of Dartmouth's history.

So I think it was a number of different suggestions, and then when I was a junior in high school, as is the case with most folks, even in those days, I got together with my parents and started talking about where I might go to college. And we visited a number of schools in the Northeast. I didn't have any particular interest in going west, still rather a parochial vision of things. And in an experience I think shared by many, my parents took me to Dartmouth, and we pulled into Hanover, and I walked onto the [Dartmouth] Green, and fell in love with the place.

And it was—it was sort of a no-brainer in some ways. It just seemed right. I applied Early Decision, and it was—happily enough, got accepted, so I didn't apply to any other school, and nothing ever really presented itself as a significant alternative. I think that if I hadn't gone to Dartmouth, I probably would have gone to Amherst [College] or Williams [College] because I think, you know, in conversations with my parents, the idealized notion of the small liberal arts college in New England was very attractive.

And I think it was also—it also represented an opportunity to, you know, transcend, you know, the—the working-class world that I had grown up in, although both my parents were educated and my father had gone to college, but we were poor. And I think the Ivy League and Dartmouth represented the ability—or the opportunity for, you know, a trans-class assimilation. You could go to Dartmouth and it would open doors to you, much in the way that my cousin had gone to Yale and had, you know, opportunities presented to him. It did seem to be a pathway.

And, again, another element of the '50s and '60s, when I was educated, was the idealization of the American public school system as essentially an escalator that would allow

talented youth to, you know, assume different class roles, to essentially become part of the professional class rather than a trade class.

And it's also particular to the nature of the '50s and '60s that—although, you know, I think much more controversial—if you were—when you were in a public school system, from the time you were in third or fourth grade, you were tested and tracked and put into essentially different classes and presented with different coursework based upon how you performed on a standard intelligence test. And I and a number of my contemporaries, in a working-class community, were fortunate enough to—to test well, and we were put into what was called the honors program.

So from the time I was in fourth or fifth grade, I was in a class segment that received special opportunities and, you know, more challenging classes and was essentially, you know, pre-selected for the opportunity to go to college. And, again, I—I was a pretty good student, and I was sort of identified as one of a—of a cohort within my high school that would have the opportunity to go on to the Ivy League or—and I think this is also significant in terms of the world that I'm trying to conjure for you—go to one of the military academies.

In the working-class community in which I grew up, the highest honor was going on to [the U.S. Military Academy at] West Point or Annapolis [the U.S. Naval Academy, and the top students—the top student athletes were—you know, became familiar with the local congressmen, and the great opportunity would be to get an appointment to one of the military academies, and that was seen to be a success.

When folks came back to the traditional Thanksgiving Day football game against our main rival, it was always a tradition for the returning graduates who were in the military academies to wear their uniforms at the football games and also for other graduates to come back in uniform. And, again, if you look up until about, you know, the—the mid '60s, for a young man to appear in uniform, it was a symbol of honor, and, you know, young men who were in the military would wear their uniforms to church, and they would have obtained a certain amount of respect and position in the

community through that service. So, again, it's a very different world.

MANNES: Right.

So your decision, obviously, like a lot of what you just said—was there also—did it also consist of a—because I know you later joined the NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. Was that factoring into your decision as well?

COOKE: Well, I—I actually joined the NROTC my senior year in high school.

MANNES: Okay.

COOKE: And, again, it was December of 1964. For me, there was this pattern that my cousin had established in going through Yale on a Navy scholarship. And, given my parents' economic situation, that also seemed like an avenue of possibility for me, so that in my senior year in high school, I took a Navy exam and did sufficiently well so that I was offered the opportunity to, while I was still in high school, to—to join the Navy, with the understanding that if I joined the Navy, the Navy would pay for my way through college, and then I would have a service obligation when I—you know, four years later.

So when it came to Dartmouth, I applied Early Decision and was accepted, and at the same time, I joined the Navy in order to be able to pay for Dartmouth, so it was—you know, it was—it was part of the overall package. And it was an opportunity—it was an alternative to going to West Point or Annapolis or the Air Force Academy. In other words, you would be able to, you know,—you joined the military, you would become an officer, and they would put you through Dartmouth. And at that point, that was one of the major avenues through which working-class young men could obtain a college education and also an Ivy League education, because all the Ivies had, you know, Navy and Army ROTC. And there was a significant chunk of the student body who were in the military. And it was just a way that, you know, you could—you could find your way into an Ivy League education without going tremendously into debt.

MANNES: Gotcha.

Okay, so I'm going to come back to NROTC later, but I want to start with—so you told me your first impressions are that you end up falling in love with Dartmouth and that Dartmouth is—was a source of comfort, in the end, for you. So what were your first impressions as a student?

COOKE: I was—I was overwhelmed.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: In—in—in a number of different ways. I was very anxious about whether or not when I got on campus I could, you know, cut the mustard, as it were, whether I was, you know, a good enough student to be in the Ivy League—you know, because I was the first person from my high school to go to Dartmouth. And so my freshman year I had—you know, had those sorts of anxieties.

I remember getting back my first set of grades, freshman year, and getting some A's and B's and feeling, *Oh, wow!* I turned a cartwheel on the Green. I said, *You know, maybe I can actually fit in here.*

So I was—I was immediately enamored of Dartmouth. I had a wonderful set of teachers. I enjoyed my peers. I had, you know, a very unalloyed, positive experience. One of the elements of Dartmouth that also was inescapable was the fact that you were living in a different world, because I was living in a different world than the one that I had grown up in, in terms of the—the educational situation.

I remember—I played lacrosse at Dartmouth for four years, and I remember, you know, going to the first, you know, couple of practices, and each time—each day you went into practice, you got a fresh role. You got a fresh T-shirt, a fresh jock, a fresh pair of socks, all cleaned and pressed, and you went out on a playing field and the grass was, like, you know, two inches thick, and it was beautifully manicured.

And when I was in high school, you didn't get a role. You wore the same T-shirt through the entire season. You brought it in from home. The playing fields, you know, have

rocks on them. You know, there wasn't much grass. You know you were - it was a working-class, you know, community. It was a—you know, a different kind of environment.

One of the things that, you know, Dartmouth was all about, you know, although I don't think I would have labeled it that way, was certainly world of privilege. You know, life was pretty sweet at Dartmouth, right?

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: Beautiful. Everything was manicured. You know, you were surrounded by preppies. It was—you know, it was a very—it was an interesting, you know, transition. But it was also one that was very welcoming, and, again, Dartmouth in 1965 was a very different place than Dartmouth is today or the Dartmouth that my daughter experienced. She's a 2012.

It was all men. It was virtually all white men, although, you know, there were some—there was a small minority population. And I think in my freshman class there were 126 high school football captains. So it was a jock-y place. And one of the ways that you—you know, you could find a place a Dartmouth was by playing sports. And everybody played intramurals, and a lot of—you know, I was a varsity athlete, you know, for four—for—for three years.

In those days, the Ivy League had rules whereby as a freshman you couldn't play on a varsity team, so there were a bunch of freshman teams as well. So it was a very jock-y, outdoorsy kind of place in which I felt very comfortable because that was the—you know, the role that I had grown up in in high school. I was a jock, you know. I was in a high school fraternity [chuckles], believe that or not.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: So there were—there were sort of—Dartmouth—you know, it all seemed very accessible to me, and I found the educational experience absolutely wonderful and, you know, continue to feel that, at least, you know, based on my first-hand experience during that year, is that I got a tremendous education at Dartmouth and a significantly better one than

my peers did at some other places. So I think that the—the emphasis on undergraduate education at Dartmouth was probably much more—more powerful in those days. Dartmouth really felt more like Amherst or Williams than it did like Yale or Harvard. And I just—you know, my four years at Dartmouth were, you know, in terms of an educational experience, quite wonderful.

And also I was at Dartmouth in a very interesting transitional period. My freshman year, I wore a beanie, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: Right? And when you were freshman at Dartmouth, you wore your beanie and you did work for the upperclassmen. You were hazed. The entire freshman class were hazed, in a friendly sort of way, but it was—you were moving into a world that had much more similarity to the 1920s and 1930s than it would to the 1970s and 1980s. You were—in 1965 you were at the tail end of a set of Dartmouth traditions that ran back to the Civil War. You know, no women, freshman beanie. You wore your beanie until you won—the freshman class won the tug-of-war against the sophomore class on the Green.

You know, there was a tremendous amount of school spirit. It was magical. My freshman year at Dartmouth was undefeated in football. They won the Lambert[-Meadowlands] Trophy as the top team in the East. They were rated, like, ninth nationally. And I remember going down at the end of my freshman autumn, hitchhiking down to Princeton [University] to watch Dartmouth, undefeated, beat Princeton, undefeated, to become the top team in the East.

So there was a tremendous amount of school spirit. There was a tremendous sense of Dartmouth as, you know, the place where a certain kind of young, white male could attain a—a—a position of—of—of dignity and prestige and opportunity in society. So it was a—it was kind of a, you know, Camelot-y kind of experience, but one that was very—initially very much tied to Dartmouth traditions.

And it was a rougher set of traditions, right? The Hovey murals [based on a drinking song by Richard Hovey, Class

of 1885] were still there. We still sang about Eleazar Wheelock and 500 gallons of New England rum. And, you know, the social life was very different, right? No women!

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: So the social life was all based upon, you know, road trips to the Seven Sisters, so different world.

MANNES: Yeah. No, it sounds idyllic, though. Can you—

COOKE: It was.

MANNES: I'm sorry?

COOKE: It was. [Laughs.]

MANNES: Yeah.

And van you tell me—so—a bit about your—what did you decide to study?

COOKE: Well, this sort of takes you back to 1957 and Sputnik. Part of the experience of being a young man with an IQ over 85 in the late '50s and early '60s is that every young man was going to be a scientist so that we could beat the Russians in the space race. So I came to Dartmouth thinking that I would go into physics or perhaps math or some form of science, although I—you know, I was also very interested in English language and literature, and that's really where my talents lay.

So my freshman year, I took—you know, second semester—I took three semesters of math. I took physics. I took chemistry. I took, you know, English and German and French. I took naval science. One of the things that people don't realize is that when you were in ROTC, two out of your nine courses each year were in naval science, right? So you're taking, you know, Introductory to Eastern Religion, you're taking Advanced Differential Calculus, and you're taking Naval Gunnery [chuckles] as one of your courses.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: Different kind of world. So I came to Dartmouth thinking that I would go into the sciences, but by the time I had, you know, reached a C-minus level in—what was it?—Math 26 or whatever it was, in chemistry and in physics, it dawned on me that I didn't have the brain power or at least that kind of brain power to be a scientist, although I—I also, you know, flirted with a geology major up until—I didn't decide on my major until my fall semester of senior year. I had taken enough science and math and geology to be a geology major, or I had taken enough English literature to be an English major, and I finally decided my senior year that I would major in English rather than geology because primarily I didn't want to miss the football season, and if I was going to stay in the geology major, I would have had to have spent the freshman—I mean the fall term of my senior year in Guatemala, studying volcanoes, and I decided I'd rather spend it in Hanover.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: [unintelligible; 55:38].

MANNES: Yeah. Well, I'd like to come back—so you've spoken a lot about how it *is* kind of idyllic experience that you had at school. You enjoyed all your classes. You enjoyed the social life. What was the experience with the Navy ROTC program?

COOKE: Well, it was a very interesting experience. I would say that by the time I had finished the summer after my freshman year—and, yet again, to put this into context, if you were in the—in ROTC, especially if you were a regular ROTC student, you were in the service. I was an enlisted man in the Navy. And whenever I wasn't at Dartmouth, I was in the Navy, so that the summer—in each of the summers between—after my freshman, sophomore and junior year, I went into uniform and spent the summer going through naval training.

And in my so-called third-class cruise, the summer after my freshman year, I was on an aircraft carrier for a month, and I was on Navy flight training up in Brunswick, Maine, flying in anti-submarine patrol ships for another three weeks. And I have to say, that was my first experience as an enlisted man in the Navy. I absolutely hated it. [Chuckles.]

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: You know, you were treated like—you know, it was not a pleasant experience, although it was a fascinating experience. You know, I have very mixed feelings about this. So it became pretty clear to me rather early on in my experience in the Navy that I was not going to be a mili- — a career officer. And I realized, you know, I—I—I had made a commitment. You know, they were paying for my education. I wasn't—I didn't particularly enjoy marching around, but that was, you know, part of the world.

And there were certainly elements, you know, throughout my military experience that in retrospect were unique and fascinating and challenging and intense in ways that few other things in my life have been. And part of my freshman year, I got to fly in an airplane for the second or third time in my life. You know, I was on an aircraft carrier, you know, eight decks down, you know, with a bunch of semi-educated enlisted men, you know, who would—you know, you could get mugged in the aircraft carrier (it was such a large, you know, world unto itself). It was fascinating, but it wasn't, you know —I didn't—felt that this resonated within my soul, was something that would be my calling for the rest of my life.

MANNES: Right. And how about *at* school. What did the program consist of?

COOKE: Well, again, back through the time tunnel. Where you know have Collis [Center for Student Involvement]—that was the ROTC building.

MANNES: Huh!

COOKE: And you would take your classes—they had, you know, Navy ROTC, Army ROTC, I guess Army, Navy—I don't think they had Air Force; they may have had a small Air Force unit. Each—I took two classes each year of naval science, which were taught, you know, on campus, and it would be, you know, Naval Gunnery, Navigation, you know, Naval History. You would—so you have—you know, two out of your nine courses would be in "naval science" (in quotes). There were a bunch of naval officers on campus who were a

part of the faculty, if you can imagine that. And every week, every Wednesday afternoon, you would have drill, in which ca- —in which event all the ROTC guys, whether you were in the Navy or the Army, would put their uniforms on and go to the—you know, to the football field, behind—you know, behind the varsity house, and you would march. We were all issued World War I-era Springfield rifles, and we'd put our uniforms on and march around, you know, and do drill, you know, on Wednesday afternoons.

And fortunately, since I was an athlete, if you were on a—on a—on an athletic team, you were forgiven drill, so I only had to drill in the autumn because in the winter and the spring I had lacrosse practice. But you know, in the—in the autumn, every Wednesday afternoon, I'd put on this itchy, wool Navy uniform and go out under the football field and march around with a rifle. You can imagine that.

MANNES: Yeah. So how did this experience—how was this experience as a college student, especially as an undergraduate at a liberal arts education, where you're sort of taught—you're kind of on your own for the first time—you're taught how to think for yourself? What is the comparison between that and being in the—in ROTC, where you have people telling *you* what to do, and you kind of are being ordered around? Is there any sort of—did that come up at all? Did you ever think about that?

COOKE: You know, I think—I think you just recognize that as part of the deal. First of all, you're amidst all your peers, right? Everybody else is marching with you—

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: —in also a Dart- —right? And we were—you know, all of us who were regular—and they were regular in contract. There were people who were—you know, who had joined the Navy and were in, and there were also students who were just kind of—you know, who were—there were guys who didn't get scholarships, who were also in ROTC. You know, maybe it's a strategy for avoiding the draft, whatever. But, you know, there was—I don't think there was a sense among us, you know, that this was something strange and odd and that it somehow impinged upon our, you know, intellectual

opportunities or curiosity. It was, you know, it was part of, you know, the world you were—you were—you were in.

MANNES: Right .

COOKE: It was part of fulfilling an obligation. It was no different in some ways than, you know, putting on your—your pads and picking up your lacrosse stick and going out to Leverone [Field House] and, you know, scrimmaging, right? They were both uniforms. Both times, you're carrying a weapon, right?

MANNES: [Laughs.]

COOKE: One form of combat a bit more stylized than the other, but if you think about what lacrosse is, it's all about, you know, Indian tribes fighting for their women, right? So if there's—it was part of a—of a role model. And there was also a—a—a tradition, and a fairly strong tradition, of military service as an emblem of—you know, the fulfillment of—of—of a societal obligation at the highest level.

Let's look at who the idealized individuals were in society, and, again, it's sort of ancient history for you, but, you know, part of why John F. Kennedy was so idealized was because of PT-109 [Motor Torpedo Boat]. He was a naval officer, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: He was a naval—in quotes—"a naval hero," and he had gone to Harvard, and, you know, he was [unintelligible; 1:04:04] into Camelot. So there was this notion, and I think it gets into the subtlety of differentiation among the military services, but there was always a sense that, you know, what you were as a naval officer was an officer and a gentleman. So there was a whole—there was a—there was a very strong social stratum associated with being a naval officer, and the fact that that was training for leadership of the country, and, you know, you looked at, you know, the history of—of—of America. They were military officers who ran this country and made it great, in many cases.

So there was a different sense, I think, of the role of military service and a very strong sense that part of being in the

ruling class was having had the experience of being a citizen soldier. And, you know, essentially it—it—it revolved around a certain image, again idealized image, of the role of the—of a man in society, as a leader, bearing social responsibility to protect the homeland in a polarized world, so that if you have this again, this kind of image of the military officer in 1964 and 1965.

And I think that in terms of the oral history you're working on, there's an immense change in the four years that I'm at Dartmouth College between the world of 1965, when I had my beanie and I came on campus and I joined ROTC, and 1969, when I graduated. So that—that—that four-year period was a period of very significant change, but I think it's helpful to understand the vision that existed, you know, in the pre-—let's call it the pre-Vietnam era of the male officer and the role of the citizen soldier in the leadership of society and the sense that, you know, part of being a young man at an Ivy League school was the notion that at some point you might well serve.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So it was very—it—it—it was very much a part of the—of the world of Dartmouth. It was very much institutionalized at Dartmouth at the beginning of this period, 1965.

MANNES: Right. Did you feel that this image of the citizen soldier was also shared by—you mentioned earlier there were the—there was also a large presence of, like, the preppy, like, maybe—like, upper-class, so to speak, population. Did they share this idea as well?

COOKE: I think so. I think—I think that—well, I—I think it was pervasive. Now, I can't speak to that segment, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: Because I came from a very different background, but I—I—I think that, you know, that was part of a world view, and I think there was probably also—there might also well have been traditions, say, if you were an Andover or an Exeter [a student at Phillips Academy Andover or Phillips Exeter

Academy] or a Choate [Rosemary Hall] graduate, you know, about perhaps taking that kind of a role.

I think an interesting example of this would be John [F.] Kerry, our current, you know, secretary of state. You know, I think he's Andover, a Yalie. Joined the Navy and, you know, essentially went into the then-current version of a PT-109, to follow in that—that John F. Kennedy path.

So I think that, you know, while the—the impetus to go into ROTC or to get—you know, to—to—to join the military as essentially a class escalator was certain much more prominent among those of us who came from a less affluent background. I think that the—the—the division of the male elitist role model of citizen soldier was probably something that was also shared within, you know, the—the upper classes, those who—you know, those folks who—or some of those folks who came from money. And I think it was in a lot of the—let's call them the WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] upper-class cohorts—you know, the 65 percent of Dartmouth who went to prep school at that point.

There were probably similar kinds of traditions of service, and I imagine that if you went to most of the prep schools that have, you know, 19th- and 18th-century foundations, somewhere in the chapel there is a—a—a marble slab with the names of dead graduates who died in the wars.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: You know, I don't know whether you've ever been to Harvard, but If you go into Memorial Hall at Harvard, it was built, you know, as a memorial to all the Harvard guys who died in the Civil War, and that was very much a part of their world. And most Ivy League schools in their chapel had the names of dead graduates, graduates who died defending our country. So that was part of the—the ethos of these institutions as conduits to leadership roles in the country. I think there was a sense of service in that regard.

And you certainly see it—you know, it was certainly there—again, when—when I was in my summer cruises with other ROTC students, there were the guys from Yale, there were the guys from Harvard, right?—all of whom had gone into

a—a—a—similar kind of a—of an environment where, in the ’50s—in the ’40s and ’50s and the early ’60s there was this notion of a—a pathway through your late adolescence into maturity that involved a certain kind of public service, and that public service was primarily in the military, although certainly in my generation, thanks to, you know, the Kennedys, you also had the alternative of the Peace Corps. And the Peace Corps became sort of this other way of, you know, engaging in public service, and it was also an option to get out of the draft, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So I think you have to realize that for most of my contemporaries, you had—you were going to have to do something when you got out of college. And either you were going to go in the military or you were going to find some way out of the military, and there were different sets of alternatives for that.

MANNES: Right. So—

COOKE: David, I’m going to put you on hold for about two seconds here.

Hi, I’ve returned. Are you still there?

MANNES: Yeah, still here.

COOKE: Let’s continue.

MANNES: So, yeah, no, I just—let’s get back into—what was the extracurricular life at Dartmouth? You spoke briefly about it, and you can feel free to bring in lacrosse as well here. I’m sure that factored in.

COOKE: Well, extracurricular life. You know,—

MANNES: Take that how you will. [Both chuckle.]

COOKE: Let’s see, if you flip back into my yearbook, what’s listed? I was in Alpha Chi [Alpha], and I, you know, enjoyed my fraternity experience. I played lacrosse, and I was in ROTC. [Chuckles.] And I was an usher at the Episcopal Church of

St. Thomas [sic; St. Thomas Episcopal Church]. So what did I do extracurricularly?

You know, lacrosse took up, you know, two of the three, you know, trimesters, so I was busy, you know, certainly in the spring—practice every day and traveling. In the winter I think we practiced also every day in the field house, so a lot of time with sports.

ROTC—you know, when I wasn't, you know, playing sports, you know, at least one afternoon a week, in which I'd be marching around carrying a rifle [chuckles], I was very much interested in other things that were going on on campus. You know, I enjoyed the [Dartmouth] Film Society. I wrote for *The D* [*The Dartmouth*].

But I also spent a lot of my time trying to have a social life [chuckles], which in those days meant road trips or dealing with mixers. I mean, it was a very different world, in which, you know, girls were not part of the scene, a different Dartmouth, in some ways a much more relaxed Dartmouth because you didn't have this whole world of, you know, hooking up and—and trying to figure out relationships in Hanover. What you do was either you had a hometown honey, who came up, you know, for Green Key [Weekend] or [Winter] Carnival or for, you know, Homecoming, or you tried to find a friend, you know, somewhere within 150 miles of Hanover.

You know, my freshman year we had something called the [*Dartmouth College*] *Green Book*. I don't know if they still have it. But it's where—you know, pictures of all the kids in the—in your freshman class, sort of like the ur Facebook. And at the end of the *Green Book* there were—there was a map of New England with the distance to travel to each of the women's colleges within 120 miles, right?

So on a typical weekend, either there would be something going on on campus and you would be busing girls in from Skidmore [College] or Smith [College] or [Mount] Holyoke [College], or you'd try to find a buddy who had a car, and you'd go on a road trip. That was sort of what social life was all about. And it revolved around road tripping and also the fraternity system.

And also the dorms. I mean, again, in the pre- —in the all-male Dartmouth, you didn't have, you know, the D-Plan, and you didn't have this, you know, perpetual rescrambling of your world every semester. I mean, you—you tended to spend the first three years of your experience in the same dorm. So I spent my first three years in Middle Fayerweather [Hall], and there was a very happy social life in Middle Fayerweather that was blended with folks.

You played—you know, everyone was involved in intramurals, playing for your—for your dorm, so there was a social life around—around the dorms and a sense of identity as being someone from Middle Mass [Massachusetts Row] or Fayer or one of the other dorms. God help you if you were in the Choates [the Choate Cluster].

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: So—but there was, you know, a very active social world but one in which, again, there was tremendous change. My freshman year, we had parietals, which meant that during the week, women had to be out of the dorms at eight o'clock. On Friday night, a woman could be in the dorm until eleven o'clock, and on Saturday night, women could be in the dorms until one o'clock in the morning. No woman could be above the first floor of a fraternity house. And if you went down to Smith or Holyoke, right, and had a date, you had to get them back to their—their dorm room by one, and there would be a house mother there [chuckles], right?

So it was a very much more protective environment, much less, I think,—certainly no hooking up—in most—I think most—again, a different world here. Most of my contemporaries were probably virgins when they got to Dartmouth, and a lot of them probably left as virgins. Contraception at—my freshman year, it was prophylactics. You know, the [birth control] pill didn't happen until well into my Dartmouth experience, so there's a whole nature of social interaction—was different.

That being said, there was always something to do on campus, and there was just so much more, you know, campus spirit, I think. You know, it was a much more sort of

vigorous kind of place than it is today. And I think the perfect example of that is Winter Carnival. You know, in the four years that I was Dartmouth—at Dartmouth, the highlight of Winter Carnival was the ski jump, right? And they had a ski jump out on the golf course, where guys—

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: —would jump off of a ski jump, right? And guys would go out there, you know, and put on a pair of skis and go down this thing and fly into the air. Now, of course, everybody would just—you know, that's—that's history.

And when you built, you know, a Winter Carnival statue, everybody went out and built it. My senior year, we had a giant dragon with a—a—a propane torch in its mouth that spewed flames [chuckles], you know? And it was, like, 80 feet high.

And—and we built the bonfire by ourselves. You know, we didn't have some guy truck—you know, you did everything yourselves, in large part because you didn't have anything else to do, right? It's 3,000 guys in the woods, right?

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: So there was much more, you know, sort of active engagement in that regard.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: Again, very superficial in terms of extracurricular activities. I also have to say I was a very serious student. I—I came to Dartmouth terrified that I wasn't going to be able to hack it, and I was a—you know, I was a serious student. I wanted to—by the time I graduated, I wanted to go on and—and be an academic, so I felt that, you know, I really—I enjoyed my courses. I had a terrific set of professors. And, to be quite honest, I would have loved to have stayed at Dartmouth for another two years and just taken more courses, I found the educational experience so wonderful in that regard. And I was kind of pissed that I had to go in the military, I must admit.

MANNES: Yeah. Did—so you spoke—we've spoken a lot about the Dartmouth experience and how it *is* kind of separate from the world. Was it removed from the Cold War, or was—or was that still pervasive around campus?

COOKE: Well, I—I think—

MANNES: And you certainly had a different experience in that, being in ROTC [spelling out the letters], in ROTC [pronouncing it ROT-C], and you would have felt that, but I guess the general atmosphere is what I'm asking about.

COOKE: Well, I think, again, you have to imagine a Dartmouth campus in which it is commonplace and part of the society to have your peers, 10 percent of your peers, 15 percent of your peers in uniform, marching up and down the street, right? And if you were in a fraternity, and most guys were, a certain percentage of your fraternity brothers would be in ROTC. It was just—it was—it was part of that—that blend of life. And, again, much more so in an accepted kind of way in the early days of my four years than towards the end, where there was, you know, a major kind of shift.

MANNES: Right.

Sorry. Are you still there?

COOKE: Yeah, I'm still here. Yes, go ahead.

MANNES: Okay. I just couldn't see.

So I want to—I want to talk a little bit about the year 1968, because there's a lot of things that happened that year that kind of—I think, at least—started to make the Vietnam [War] into a more national—I don't know if "national story" is the right word, but certain things that just kind of drove the country into a new era, such as the Tet—there's the Tet Offensive, MLK [the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.] is assassinated, RFK [Robert F. Kennedy] is assassinated, there's the Mỹ Lai Massacre, there's the antiwar protests at the Democratic National Convention. Is that—does any of that factor in the Dartmouth—did that start changing anything?

COOKE: Oh, of course. I—I—I think you—you know, there was a tremendous sea change at—at Dartmouth, and I don't think it—it—it certainly began before 1968—it might have reached a climax in 1968, but, you know, you certainly have a—a—a—a societal change is going on, and I think that it tracks through both the polit- —national politics, the politics of the Vietnam War and the way society was—the way education was being handled.

And I think—you know, again, let me sort of track a parallel evolution. I spoke a little bit earlier about my freshman year, about parietals, right?—that you couldn't have women in the dorms, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: By my senior year, all that had gone, and people were cohabiting, right? They had already had the first co-ed weekends. You know, [Mary L.] "Meryl" Streep had come up and spent some time as a—as a student. There were tremendous social changes during that period of time. And there were—and—and—within Dartmouth, although Dartmouth was always a much more insular environment. It was—it was away from the center of the student unrest, which really grew out, you know, primarily of [the University of California,] Berkeley and then, you know, at some of the—at the urban universities, primarily Harvard. That all sort of resonates into Hanover but at some kind of a remove.

You get to 1968, and Dartmouth is right in the middle of it, right? Because you have Malcolm X coming to the campus. You have George [C.] Wallace [Jr.] coming to the campus. You are certainly in the midst of seeing the Vietnam War on television. You have guys that you knew as a freshman getting killed in Vietnam, right?—guys that you were in ROTC with—

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: They're already dead at this point, right? So—and there—there is also a sense that with Tet and with, you know, the—I guess the popularization, the immediacy of the news coverage of the Vietnam War, you're in the midst of this. And there's also a growing realization between 1964 or '65 and

’68 that suddenly, instead of having 65,000 troops in Vietnam, you’ve got a million or 500,000, 750,000 kids, ages 17 to 21, your contemporaries, who are now in the rice paddies, right?

And for those of us who came from a working-class background, our high school classmates who didn’t go to college, who got drafted, are all in country now. And of my—the close—there was, like, seven of us—there were seven close friends of mine that I grew up in high school with, who were sort of a little gang. And four of us went in the military. I went in late. Three of my friends had already gotten drafted and were in Vietnam, right? So suddenly this becomes much less theoretical.

And also, you know, again, 1964, December of ’64 or the beginning of 1965, when I go into ROTC, nobody ever dreamed that the Vietnam War would extend for that long a period of time. So suddenly this is all sort of changing. Suddenly, with—really in ’66, ’67, there’s a huge buildup of an American military presence in Vietnam, and there is the increasing realization on the part of my peer group—right?—my cohort that, *Shit, I could get killed over there!* Right?

And this isn’t World War II. Not necessarily winning. So there’s a—there’s a tremendous sense of angst that comes onto campus, and it ties into a lot of other social changes, primarily driven by the civil rights movement, right? And all kinds of horrors happened, right? You’ve got Martin Luther King getting shot. You know, there—there is suddenly a much more intrusive effect of the outside world on the Dartmouth community.

And one of the ways you feel it, one of the ways *I* felt it as someone in ROTC is suddenly Dartmouth ends up being visited by traveling circuses of outside political agitators, which is a very important part of trying to understand what happened in 1968 on the Dartmouth campus, is that there were groups of young people, who went from campus to campus across America, staging antiwar demonstrations.

And they would essentially come into—they would arrive, you know, on a Thursday afternoon in Hanover, right? A convoy of cars would come up from New Haven

[Connecticut] or from Boston [Massachusetts], and suddenly there would be demonstrators on campus you'd never seen before, who would then, you know, attract like-minded members of the Dartmouth community, and suddenly there was a very different presence within Hanover, within what had been more or less the Dartmouth bubble. You start having outside agitators coming to campus.

And also—you know, it's also part of the surrounding world and society. And you've got a lot of guys, you know, especially guys who came from backgrounds of privilege, suddenly facing the fact that *shit, I may actually have to do something like this*, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: And I think there was a lot of feeling on the part of certain elements that *you've got to get this thing over with or else I'm going to get drafted*, right? So a—a chill comes on the campus, and with it, you know, Dartmouth sort of gets pulled into this larger student movement by having groups of students and not-students coming onto campus and agitating.

So the—the—the—the little pastoral world of Hanover during this four-year period, maybe it—maybe it peaks in '68 and '69—suddenly the world changes a little bit, and you've got demonstrations on campus. You know, I think the majority of Dartmouth students are still part of that world that they were in when they got there, but certainly there are—the outside world intrudes in Hanover in a way that it hadn't so much before.

MANNES: Right.

And so what are your—can I ask you what were your personal thoughts on the anti-war protesters or agitators is the word you used?

COOKE: Well, I think, you know, having been sat upon, I was not particularly, you know,—I didn't have particularly warm feelings toward them, particularly with regard to the guys that weren't from Dartmouth, right? I mean, Dartmouth was a pretty insular place. I know—I certainly had no problem with

my peers, you know, having different political views about the war. I think by the time you get into—by the time Tet has gone through, you realize that this is pretty much of a mess, right?—that there—that this might have been a terribly bad idea.

You know, at the same time, you know, you're in a situation that—at least in my case—you know, you've made a commitment; you're in the military right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: If you drop out of Dartmouth, you go into the Navy for four years as an enlisted man. And you're in, you know. That's it. You got a crew cut. You've—you've—you've made a commitment. What are your alternatives? Canada? Sweden? So that—you've sort of—you've gone into this in one world, and now you're living with the consequences of that in the second world.

I think that—I would say—again, maybe this is just from my perspective—I would say that 85, 90 percent of the—of the students at Dartmouth were either ambivalent or opposed to the antiwar agitators or those on the campus who acted out. But there was also sympathy, you know. I think my—you know, two of my best friends from high school, you know, did whatever they could to stay out the military. And that—you know, it was real. I mean, you—you work in a—certainly, I personally was not in a position of condemning someone because they didn't want to go to—go to Vietnam, right? You know, it was not—you know, I had seen—at this point, I had had high school buddies of mine killed there, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: And there were Dartmouth guys getting killed there that I knew from ROTC. And that's a pretty chilling experience. So I think they'd know there was a lot of ambiguous [unintelligible; 1:31;53], but also I think, you know, maybe sort of a parochial feeling on the part of a lot of students that, you know, these guys—these aren't Dartmouth people. These are people from God knows where, you know. And if you look at a lot of the contemporary imagery and you look at the people, you know, wearing sort of grotesque parodies

of military uniforms, none of those folks were from Dartmouth. They were from out of town.

And there was a sense that, you know, *God, what are they trying to make this? They're trying to make Dartmouth into Harvard? Are they trying to make this into Columbia [University]? Are they trying to make this into Berkeley?* It just wasn't really part of, you know, what the majority of students were feeling, although, listen, everybody at this point, or virtually everybody had a draft card in their wallet that was going to send them into the military when they graduated.

So this suddenly became personal in a different kind of way, and I think it—it forced a lot of people to—to think about things that they wouldn't have otherwise. And, again, I—I talked a lot earlier in our conversation about class differences. I think this is also an area in which class differences made a—really became prevalent because I think there was a sense, basically—and this was part of something that was a larger sense of dislocation in the country—that if you came from money, you could get out of it. And there were lots of guys running off to their mom's or their dad's psychologists and getting, you know, "psych outs." [Chuckles.] Or joining the Peace Corps.

MANNES: Right, yeah.

COOKE: Or becoming high school teachers or whatever, or trying to go to grad school. There were always outs if you had money, but if you were some poor working-class slob, you're goin' in. So there were—there were—there was a lot of class tension there. But there was also a lot of, you know, individual soul searching about, *Gee, what's gonna happen a year from now when I graduate? Am I gonna get drafted? Jesus! I don't wanna*—you know. And especially if you get drafted into some war which is suddenly being portrayed in a way that's very different from the east-west vision of the world that you had when you were a kid, right? This isn't World War II. This isn't defending America against the Nazis. It's getting involved in some kind of a neo-colonial fight in a foreign country where it's not very clear why we're there or whether this is worth dying for.

So there was—it was a real sea change, and there was also a lot of stuff just—you know, it was a very tumultuous time in the country. And, again, you're up in Hanover a year, and you're in the ivory tower, and yet I had buddies at [John] Hopkins [University] in Baltimore in 1968, where tanks came into the city to quell the rioting after Martin Luther King was assassinated.

So there's all kinds of, you know, pardon my French, shit breaking out across the—across the country. There were riots in Chicago in the—at the Democratic Convention. There's a sense of dislocation in society and a—a real, you know, sense that the world of the '50s and '60s was coming to an end and there was a radical change going on.

And it's also very important to put this into sort of a---a social context and an intellectual context, because one of the other things that's happening between 1965 and 1968—and brace yourself for this—is the Beatles and the change in American music. There is a huge, huge explosion of contemporary culture in terms of where rock music is going at this point, and part of that social change is an underlying, you know, social activism. You've got Bob Dylan singing songs. You've got Peter, Paul and Mary singing songs. You've got Creedence Clearwater [Revival] singing songs. You have—you know, Woodstock [Music & Art Festival] is on the—is on the horizon. You have a huge youth social movement among the baby boomers, where the old constraints of society are being set aside. People—no more beanies. [Laughs.] Right?

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: No more tug-of-war between the freshman class and the sophomore class. There's a –you're—you're--Dartmouth is like this little bubble of a—of an ivory tower floating in this now very—you know, very tempestuous seas of social change, and it *does* come onto campus, and you do have—you know, when George Wallace came to campus, there was a riot. The rioters weren't Dartmouth students, by and large, although we had—you know, Dartmouth had, you know, had a Students for a Democratic Society group, and you'd probably be—your contemporaries will be speaking with some of that group. And there were about, you know, maybe 20 guys who are, you know, part of the SDS.

And, of course, the SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, was a pan-campus organization, so when you talk about outside agitators coming in, you know, it's the five guys at Dartmouth who are in SDS bringing in their buddies from Northampton or Amherst, for the traveling SDS circus onto campus. And they literally went from campus to campus and organized, you know, demonstrations. So they *were* outside agitators. It's not that they weren't guys at Dartmouth who had sympathies for them.

But, again, my perception and perhaps a skewed one, given my background, which I've been very, you know, open about—I'd say 5 percent of the Dartmouth population, you know? And then you look at that bunch and, yeah, you know, there's a lot of ego tripping going on. You know, I think that—you know, I think that when—when Parkhurst Hall was—was occupied, it was about 12 guys, and the rest of the campus is outside sort of, you know, drinking beer and—and waiting for the police to come and throw them out. You know, they thought they were a bunch of, you know, egotistical assholes who were, you know, on an ego trip.

And if you take a look at the imagery of the time, you see them smoking a cigar with their—with their feet up on a John—you know, John [S.] Dickey's [Class of 1929], you know, desk in Parkhurst. It was an ego trip. But, you know, in the end it was sort of like a snowball fight [chuckles], you know, or an all-campus water fight. I mean, it was something that happened.

Suddenly you'll have the—you know, the New Hampshire State Police come in with Belgian shepherds [sic; Belgian malinoises or German shepherds] that were, like, the biggest dogs I've ever seen. You know, it was certainly a happening, but it wasn't necessarily a happening that—that came to Dartmouth internally; it was something that sort of came to Dartmouth from the outside. But it was also part of a much larger intrusion of the world into the bubble of what Dartmouth, you know, so often is, as a small college in the middle of nowhere.

MANNES: Right.

So—sorry, did I interrupt you?

COOKE: No, go ahead.

MANNES: So I—yeah. So this idea of the citizen soldier as, like, an ideal, it sounds like is really changing this time, and I know ROTC was later ended at Dartmouth, so what was—what was your experience as we move from ’68 and ’69 and towards your graduation, the campus climate about ROTC and your relationship with other students regarding this? Was there any tension there for you?

COOKE: Well, I think that it was certainly a huge transition for me, personally, right? You know, as I mentioned early on in my experience as a—as a midshipman, it became clear to me that I was not cut out to be in the military, you know, in terms of a career or a world. And I didn’t like people giving me orders. I wasn’t particularly excited about getting killed. I wasn’t feeling particularly gung-ho about, you know, ending up in Vietnam, although I did.

In terms of the atmosphere on campus among my peers, I never felt, with regard to my fraternity, with regard to my teammates and with regard to most of my—virtually all of my friends at Dartmouth anything other than support for where I was as being in ROTC.

Where I felt under attack was in situations in which people from outside of Dartmouth came to Dartmouth in order to make a demonstration and to have us, as those in ROTC, become the target of a—of a political demonstration that had nothing to do with us as individuals but had to do with us as symbols of the military in society. And indeed you are a symbol in that case. You’re wearing a uniform. You become a symbol of the military-industrial complex. You become a symbol of American imperialism. You become a symbol of cultural and—and—and racial dominance, right? There’s all kinds of—you become an easy target because you’re wearing—because you *are* a target. You’re wearing—you are living in a—in a—in an image of a certain kind of world.

And certainly, by the time I’m graduating from Dartmouth, no one is wearing a uniform to church anymore. No one is wearing a uniform in public because you become a target for

all kinds of anxieties and antipathies that are going on in a—in a—in a period—a very turbulent period in American society that has to do with race, with gender and with, you know, political philosophy. It's a very tumultuous period of time. And [to the extent? 1:42:08] you're in the military, you become, you know, a—a symbol of this as soon as you put that uniform on. So none of the guys in ROTC wore uniforms anymore, and one of the things you have to deal with is the fact you're the only guy in Hanover with a crew cut. [Laughs.] Right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So there are lots of changes. But I have to say that during that period of time, I never felt anything other than support and, you know, brotherhood from my fellow Dartmouth students, with a very small exception of—you know, there was certainly a group of students who had a different political agenda, largely came from a different political background and experience than I did, and they were part of the society, and they were also, you know, the ones who were seeking attention. I think there was a huge element of late adolescent ego in the whole SDS movement. It was all about acting out.

And, you know, most Dartmouth students—if they were going to act out, wanted to act out on the—on the playing field rather than in the newsreel. So there was that element in campus. It was very exciting. It was very interesting. And it had to do a lot with pulling Dartmouth and Dartmouth students into the world that they had largely left when they went out to this, you know, this ivory tower in the middle of the woods. So it was a very interesting period of time, but I never felt alienated from my peers.

MANNES: Yeah. And how about—what about the reaction from the administration, from the professors, from the town of Hanover, besides the other people here besides the students?

COOKE: Well, I think—you know, the amount of inter- —interaction with the people of Hanover was pretty limited. I think they probably felt—my sense was that they weren't particularly—they also looked at the—at—at the theater that went on, the

circuses, the street theater that went on in Hanover as something that had come in from “away.”

[Another voice, and squeaking and other noises.]

COOKE: Do I still have you, David?

MANNES: Yeah, I’m sorry, someone just opened the door.

COOKE: No problem. The outside world intruding.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: In—in terms of faculty, I think, you know,—faculty, you know,—as someone who had a brief romance with the academic world and was a part of it in other—in other roles over the rest of my life, you know, faculty tends to be, you know, two things: much more liberal in its—in its viewpoint of things and not necessarily Dartmouth, right? In most—most of the faculty, you know, aren’t Dartmouth people, and there is a certain—certainly, there was much more I think excitement, much more thrill within the faculty, probably, about these student demonstrations than within the student body because, you know, a traditionally—and certainly the case today in—in—in academic world, in academia, and at Dartmouth—you know, 85, 90 percent of the faculty are of liberal or left-wing persuasion. Those are the kind of people who end up in the academic world.

And there was much more sympathy and I think a sort of a sense of, you know, envy, right? *Well, gee, they did this at Harvard. Why can’t they do this at Dartmouth?* You know, there was a little bit of that going on as well. So I think there was probably much more sympathy within the faculty for the antiwar movement than perhaps in the student body, itself.

I think the administration at this point was still reasonably conservative. John Sloane Dickey was still the president of Dartmouth, and I think there was still elements, older elements in the faculty that had been in the Second World War, right?—that had—had gone through this experience, themselves. There were people in there who had been in the military rather than people who had sort of spent their entire life, you know, in the cocoon of academia.

But, you know, again, as an undergraduate living in a house or, you know, living in Fayerweather and going to classes and playing sports, you know, it was there. It was around us. You know, it was part of the excitement of what was going on. Just as part of the excitement that was going on was the fact that your girlfriend was coming up from Mount Holyoke, that you could sleep over in your dorm room, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: And maybe you'd go out to the Bema and smoke dope, right? There was a lot of things happening in this period of time, right? I would say that the majority of the Dartmouth population is getting stoned for the first time between 1967 and 1969. So you have lots of different things going on. It's not just, you know, drinking Keystone in the fraternity basement. It's going out to the golf course and smoking a joint.

So lots of—and listening to the Rolling Stones or to Loving [sic; The Lovin'] Spoonful. There's a huge sea change going on in society that reaches Hanover, and part of that sea change had to do with this war in Vietnam and a certain element of seriousness that comes into your life when your peers are getting yanked out of their world and sent to someplace where they're getting shot at.

And that's—that's a chilling experience that certainly was not something that—we'd all read about it. It's something our parents had gone through, but it was always with the aura of the triumphalism of the Second World War, and now suddenly there's a war going on we're not necessarily winning, where people your age are dying in obscure rice paddies, being shot by people who were, you know, of a different color, were a different race and using, you know, weaponry that comes from—from China and Russia.

So it's a very—very—it was a very exciting and interesting and intense period of time, where Hanover is trying to integrate itself into the world and the expectations of the folks who came out of the '60s like I did, the early '60s, go through this incredible period of change. I would say that between 1965 and 1969, the four years I spent at

Dartmouth, there was probably more social change in this country than there had been in the prior 50 years. It all happened in this very small period of time, and things were happening in parallel, you know, currents.

Again, I would go back to the popular culture. I don't think we can underestimate or overestimate—I mean, you can overestimate the power of rock 'n' roll as a way of expressing social change and differences in social attitudes, and it ties into the ways people—into the way people related to one another, and then suddenly it does throw into stark contrast this now, you know, sort of almost quaint notion of the citizen soldier and duty and obedience to authority. That all becomes very questioned.

MANNES: Yeah.

So, I mean, in the midst of all of this, you move towards graduation and you eventually graduate. What were your thoughts, and did you—you didn't go immediately into serving, is that correct? You had a time afterwards, or—

COOKE: I—I—I—actually, the way they worked it is that you were commissioned the day before you graduated so that you couldn't graduate until you got your commission and was in the service, so I was immediately in the service. I had tried to get a postponement of my active duty so I could go to graduate school. I had been accepted at a bunch of graduate schools. And that was turned down. So I was in.

And, you know, fortunately, at least initially, I was in the Navy, and I was assigned to a – great term here - a destroyer—how's that for an aggressive world to live in?

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: I was a junior officer on a destroyer, and I went off to—to Boston, where my ship was in the yards, and then I was home-quartered in Newport [Rhode Island], so I was in. My friends were—you know, all my peers were doing their best to do something else. My best friend was, you know, teaching in college—I mean teaching in high school to get a deferment. Two of my other friends went and got psych deferments while these, you know, other groups of—other

friends of mine were coming from the war at this point because they had served their two years as draftees.

So I'm in. And I've got—you know, and I've got—you know, and I'm not particularly happy about it [chuckles] because when I—you know, when I'm in Boston and I walk into Harvard Square, I'm the only guy with a crew cut. And God forbid you walk into Harvard Square in uniform, as I once did, and you have people, you know, scream at you, the only place where I was spat on in public because I was walking around as a naval officer. Not fun.

MANNES: Yeah. Well, what were your—so what were thoughts on going to Vietnam in general, especially because—I—I don't know all about the Navy, but serving on a ship, you knew you were going to be on a ship and you weren't going to be fighting on the ground, but over all, what were your thoughts—

COOKE: Well, let me first of all—

MANNES: —and concerns?

COOKE: Let me correct your assumption. I was actually stationed in a Vietnamese fishing village, on the ground,—

MANNES: Okay.

COOKE: —as an adviser to the Vietnamese junk force, so I was in a—I was in a fishing village north of Da Nang, in country. I wasn't sitting in a destroyer.

MANNES: Okay.

COOKE: So I was in—right? And I was, you know, in country, carrying a rifle. [Laughs.] So not what I had anticipated! And just as a thumbnail, the reason I got my orders to Vietnam was because I shot my mouth off in the wardrobe—in the ward room on my destroyer, basically saying what a stupid war Vietnam looked like, and I was told that I wouldn't really understand it until I'd been there. And two weeks later, I had order—orders in country to be a political warfare officer in the 3rd Riverine, in the Mekong Delta, on PBR [Patrol Boats,

River], which are basically Boston whalers with, you know, a 50 mm machine gun in the bow. [Chuckles.]

So I—I got orders into a terrible situation. So I had—and—and fortunately, the way things worked out, by the time I got there, someone much more serious about their naval career, who wanted to have combat experience, took my billet and I ended up doing something a little bit less dangerous.

But I was—you know, I was in country. I wasn't, you know, cruising off the coast in the gun line. I was scared shitless. I got my orders. I thought—first I—this was—I was—at that point, I was on board ship, and we were in the—in the Mediterranean [Sea], hunting Russian submarines, doing top secret work in the Med. And I shot my mouth off, and I then got these orders. My executive officer screwed me because he was a Vietnam veteran and didn't like me because I went to the Ivy League.

I got my orders. I was terrified, especially when I saw where I was being sent. I—I—I then had a set of decisions, you know. *Well, what do I do? Do I go to Sweden? Do I try to get my orders changed?* What do you do? And in the end, I went—you know, not—you know, not with a great deal of enthusiasm but with a sense, you know, in the end that I had made this commitment and that's what you do, you know? You—I had joined the service. I had—I had taken my oath, and, you know, I went.

You know, terrified my parents, right? And now, as a parent, I can—I can only begin to imagine what it would have been like for them, you know, to see me off at the airport. [Chuckles.] You know, it was—it was, you know,—it was one of the two or three low points in my life when I got those orders, because I'd already had friends killed there.

And this is now 1971, right? And it's clear that we're not going to win the war. So this is post-Tet. So I was—you know, I was not a—I was not gung-ho about this. And I didn't volunteer, but I went.

MANNES: Right. So what—so can you talk—I—I assume it's not too classified to talk about what you were doing in Vietnam. Can

you explain a bit of what your role was and what your job was while you were there?

COOKE: All right, well, some of it's still classified, but not much. What my role was eventually, after I—I—when I got to Saigon on December 23rd, two days before Christmas, I found out that my orders to the Mekong Delta had been taken by someone who was senior to me, who wanted the combat experience. And I then sat for a couple of days, waiting for an alternate set of orders and finally got a set of orders to be a—a—a watch officer with the Naval Advisory Group 143 in I Corps, which is the northern quarter of South Vietnam.

And I was stationed in a—in a fishing village called Quảng Trị, and I worked with a set of Vietnamese counterparts, Vietnamese naval officers. And essentially, we had a string of radar sites on mountaintops at various places along the northern coast of Vietnam, and we had a group of armored junks and patrol craft that were patrolling the coastline to prevent the infiltration of the North Vietnamese Army into I Corps.

And my job was to work in the—in the control center in this little fishing village and vector armored junks and patrol craft to intercept infiltrators from the northern part of Vietnam, who were coming down the coastline to run arms, you know, to the local combatants.

And fortunately, most of my job was, you know, sitting in a—sitting in a small hooch, you know, working the radios and, you know, acting as a liaison between the American advisers who [unintelligible; 1:57:47] the Vietnamese armed forces to coordinate both the—the coastal patrol activities and also to coordinate naval gunfire support from those destroyers off of the course—off of the coast and the aircraft carriers off of the coast of Vietnam, so that part of what I did was to act as an intermediary, to speak to the American advisers that the Vietnam combat troops, to then pass on information to the gun line so that we could call in naval gunfire onto the battlefields where—where—where combat was going on.

So I spent a lot of my time, you know, forwarding gunfire coordinates to—to bring in fire on—on the enemy. And I would stand 12-hour watches, and then I'd get in a Jeep and

go back to my—my hooch on, you know, a naval base with—with other naval and—and Marine, you know, soldiers and sailors.

MANNES: Right.

Could you just clarify one thing for me? What does I Corps stand for?

COOKE: Okay, the—South Vietnam during the Vietnam War was broken into four military areas, and they were each given a Roman numeral designator from north to south, so you have Roman number I, and since it looks like an I, it was called I Corps. And I Corps was the responsibility of the Marine Corps. Then you had II Corps, III Corps and IV Corps. IV Corps was down in the Mekong Delta. We basically divided the country into four military districts. I Corps was where all the stuff was happening, a lot of the stuff was happening, because that's the northern part of South Vietnam, and our northernmost outpost was right on the DMZ, the [Vietnamese] Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam.

So during the period that I was there, in '71 and '72, the North Vietnamese Army invaded the South and came through I Corps and got to within about 30 miles of where I was living, so there was a huge battle going on during the spring of 1972, called the Easter Offensive, which was kind of the dress rehearsal for the eventual fall of Vietnam three years later. So the I Corps was where, you know, the DMZ was, it was where Huế, the old imperial capital, an area in which there was a lot of combat going on and which, by the time I got there, there were several North Vietnamese armies that had infiltrated into I Corps. And I used to be able to sit at night at my command post and look out over—into the A Sầu Valley and see—every night there would be—you could see tracer fire going back and forth between the—the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietnamese and American forces. So it was like the Fourth of July every night. You got to see the firing going on.

[unintelligible; 2:01:08]

MANNES: Right. I'm sorry?

COOKE: No, I was saying there was a lot going on. And we had—you know, we—we—we had, you know—give tremendous credit to the North Vietnamese. We had sappers. These are like North Vietnamese frogmen [chuckles], which would periodically, you know, swim across—there was, like, an inter- —there was, like, a—bay. You know, we were on a peninsula. They would swim across the bay and—and—and put [unintelligible; 2:01:39] mines on ships and stuff like that. So there was—there was stuff going [on] all the time in that particular region in I Corps.

MANNES: Gotcha.

And so what—so as an adviser, what kind of advice would you be giving to—obviously to help call in naval gunfire, but was there another capacity to this?

COOKE: You know, it was—it—it—it's complicated. What in the end you would do is to essentially provide a kind of armature around which the Vietnamese Navy would sculpt its—its—its forces. You ended up working with the Vietnamese officers to try to get things done. And one of the issues, of course, was the fact that the Vietnamese military in the South wasn't a terribly motivated or successful operation, so that you had a lot of American advisers trying to get their Vietnamese counterparts to actually go and engage with the enemy. But, you know, basically you work in parallel, you know, and in some ways, you know, it was, you know, the Americans running the war for the Vietnamese.

MANNES: So how did you approach this relationship, then, when it's clear to you that they're not—they're not quite a competent force or competent enough force to necessarily win, and the overall war is not going your way?

COOKE: Well, you do the best you can. And it—it gets you into the—for me, it was—you know, I—when I got my orders, I was then for six months of training in Coronado, California, during which—because I don't remember—I learned Vietnamese, I took an extended course in Vietnamese history and culture, and I also learned how to shoot a bunch of different weapons, right?—and how to run, you know, a patrol boat and learned all kinds of mechanical things.

Part of what you learned was how complex Vietnamese society is and that there are lots of different elements in society in Vietnam, and a lot of interesting history, right? Because Vietnam was part of French Indochina, and the French had been there 300 years, right? You know, the French colonized Southeast Asia, through the Jesuits, in the 1640s, about the same time that the Pilgrims were coming to the United States. So there's been a longstanding French presence there.

Since I'm working in the Navy, I tend to be working—my Vietnamese counterparts tend to be Vietnamese who had become part of the French colonial society, so most of my contemporary—most of—most of my advisees are French speakers as well as Vietnamese speakers, so I'm speaking to them in French more than in—in—in Vietnamese because my Vietnamese is terrible. I'm sort of tone deaf, and Vietnamese is an intonated language, like Chinese, so it's kind of hard to understand unless you have a very good ear.

And I'm—I'm trying to—to work with them, to motivate them to do things. A lot of them are in the navy because their parents are well enough wired into Vietnamese society so they're not in the army, where there's a tremendous, you know, casualty rate. The navy—you know, it is a safer way to go at things, right? So you're tending to—the people I tended to deal with, the officers I was dealing with that were in the Vietnamese Navy tended to come from the colonial society, and the enlisted men I'm dealing with in the Vietnamese Navy tend to come—tend to be fishermen, because, you know, they're people who know boats.

And one of the things you discover in the mix of Vietnamese society, which is a bunch of different cultures together, is that there is a core group of Vietnamese who are Catholic, who have been essentially, you know, integrated into western society. They're sort of the colonial lackeys. And you have a lot of fishermen, who are violently anti-communist. And one of the things—one of the tragedies for me is a lot of the Vietnamese Navy guys I worked with had tattoos all over them that said "Death to the Viet Cong." Can you imagine what happened to them after we left?

I mean, there's lots of stories here. I mean, the biggest tragedy was what happened to Vietnam *after* we left, because certainly, all the people that had been coopted by us, all ended up, you know, going into concentration camps if they weren't killed outright. There's a huge disaster at the end of all this that we kind of walk away from and forget about, and, you know, for those of us who were advisers and who worked day to day with the Vietnamese, we know that each of the people that we worked with who didn't manage to get out of there in 1975 ended up either being killed or sent to a concentration camp.

So there's a—there's a huge—I mean, there's a lot of problems, and 35,000—or was it 53,000 Americans die and are wounded in Vietnam. There are hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who we supported, who end up going into terrible situations after we leave. And no one talks about that, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: You know, you know, the biggest crime we perpetrated there, in some ways, was the betrayal of the people that we were ostensibly, you know, supporting, because we cut and ran. You know, not that you were going to win. I mean, it's a very complicated—I have very complicated feelings about it. You know, for me, the—the best symbol of why we lost, is that, you know, I was in a fishing village, and it was on a peninsula, and then there was a big sort of internal harbor area. If you look at the map of Da Nang, in North Vietnam, where international shipping would come in. And ammunition ships would come in to Da Nang harbor and anchor out in this internal harbor, and they would unload their munitions onto barges.

So you would have these barges that are sort of floating off of the coast where we—where our fishing village is, and there's, like, 50[,000], 60,000 tons of ammunition on this barge, and it's being protected by the South Vietnamese Army. So they're army guys sitting on this barge, protecting it from the North Vietnamese frogmen who come in every week and try to blow it up. And—and the group I work with run little patrol boats around and—and visit the barges at night to make sure everything's all right. Night in and night

out, you'd go out to one of these barges, 50[,000], 60,000 tons of—of munitions on the barge, and every one of the Vietnamese soldiers would be asleep. Okay?

Put that in context. This is what you're dealing with, right? You're dealing with a situation in which these guys are sitting on 40,000 dol- —40,000 tons of TNT. They know that there are North Vietnamese frogmen in the water coming in, and they're—they go to sleep, right? That's when I knew that we were never going to win the war [chuckles], right? Because how do deal with that kind of mentality?

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: So, you know, it was—you know, it was—it was not a happy, you know, situation, and yet, you know, the Vietnamese I worked with—charming people. Educated. When I first came into my little hooch, my Vietnamese counterpart was reading Proust, in French, of course.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: Complicated.

MANNES: So—so how do *you*—how would *you* find the motivation to be doing your job when it seems like a lot of the situation was just beyond your control or hopeless, in some sense?

COOKE: Well, I guess it's like being a Republican when [Donald J.] Trump is nominated for president. [Chuckles.] I don't know.

MANNES: [Laughs.]

COOKE: You know, it's—there was a certain element of self-preservation, and there was certainly an ele- —a certain element of professionalism, right? You were expected to—you know, I was an American naval officer. I had been a fleet-qualified officer of the deck. I had done—you know, I knew how to drive a ship. I—I knew how to, you know, shoot a gun. I knew how to do the technology. I just did my job as best as I could—you know, just as I do the best job I can now, years later, as a lawyer. You know, maybe you have a client you don't love. You still, you know, try to do the best job you can.

And, you know, it was also enlightened self-interest at a certain point, right? Because, you know, if you couldn't motivate these guys to go out and—and stand guard duty, someone was going to come in and shoot you [chuckles], so you—you tried to do the best you could in a- —you know, in a com- —originally for self-preservation and—and in terms of your—of a sense of professionalism. You know, again, you're still—you know, go back to this Old World—you know, pre- —pre-1960s image of—of service and leadership. You're still—you're still in the uniform. You're a naval officer. You have a sense of history, a sense of duty, a sense of obligation, and you do the best you can in this situation.

And I think that's probably true of anyone who's involved in—in a wartime situation. You know, it's—it's confusing. It's—it's tragic. It's—it's appalling. It's, you know, surreal. You know, stuff that went on there, you know,—the four years I spent in the service, I did things and I saw things that I would never have been able to imagine in the rest of my life, you know? You know, there's dead bodies all over the place. You know, people are shooting at you. You know, it's just that—but that's the world you're in, and you—you—you do your best to do—to—to play your role and—and to survive. In the end it's sort of primal.

MANNES: Yeah. If you—if you are comfortable with it, could you walk me through or mention a few of those moments you just referred to?

COOKE: [Sighs.] Well, you know, we—we certainly had instances in which we were getting shelled, and it was—it was, you know, bizarre in the sense that, you know, you'd be in your hooch and there was a North Vietnamese sapper unit across the bay from us, and they would—every night, they would shoot rockets across the—the bay, and the rockets would land in and around our compound, so that, you know, you had no idea when they were coming. They would just sort of land randomly.

And on one occasion, I had one go over my head fairly close to me and land across the street and kill a couple of people. That was probably the closest I got to, you know, real danger. And then for days after that, I had a hard time

sleeping, right? Because who knows what was going to come through the roof?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: You know, you know, there was just—people were dying all over the place. I was sitting in my—my hooch or sitting in, you know, at—at—at my command post, and I heard this tremendous explosion, and debris rained down the area. There—there was an American jet that had collided with a Vietnamese spotter plane right over where we were, and debris rained down—it was a huge explosion, right? And debris rains down on our little command post, including pieces of the pilot, right?

How do you deal with that, you know? You—we ended up having someone's foot in the refrigerator. You know, it's surreal. You know, that's just—that's something you don't, you know, come in contact with in the rest of the world.

And—and—and how surreal was it? Driving—you know, driving from where I lived out to where I—where our command post was, you would drive down this road, and at a certain point when I was there, the—the Seabees came in, and they dug out a huge trench next to the road, about 15, 20 feet deep, and then as you drove by the next day, that—they then build this huge trench with Jeeps and trucks and military equipment, and they buried it because they—because at this point there were Vietnamese—the Vietnamization had happened. We were pulling people out, and they just buried tens of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment. Just buried it, right? So here's—here's, you know, millions of d- —you know, huge amounts of money just being buried.

We had a—we had a—a—a radar station on the top of a—of a hill nearby, called Monkey Mountain, and I would drive up to see the sailors running the radar station. On the way up, at a certain point about three-quarters of the way up, there was the tail end of an American [McDonald Douglas] F-4 [Phantom II] fighter plane—I don't know if you've ever heard the expression of "auguring in"—that had augured into the mountainside. So you drive past—you'd be going up this road, there would be the tail section of an American jet

buried in the side of the—of the mountain, you know, with graffiti on it [chuckles], right? And, of course, there was some guy in that jet, who took it in, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So there's—you're—you're surrounded by this chaotic world. You would—I would drive to work, and alongside the road there would be troops of monkeys. You know, you're in a tropical environment. One day, you know, driving back from my 12-hour shift at this control boat, there was an anaconda that had come across the road that had stolen a pig from the local village. And it was, like, you know, a 30-foot snake—

MANNES: Wow.

COOKE: —slithering across the road, and you drove—I drove over it in the Jeep, and it didn't even flinch, right? So you're in this world where there—there are giant, you know, anacondas and boa constrictors and monkeys, and, you know, you're—you're just in a very different environment, and it's bizarre. It's absolutely bizarre, because it's a beautiful place. The area we were in—in—in—outside of Da Nang, prior to the war, had been a French resort area, okay. And I had the experience, on a couple of occasions, when I had an afternoon off, of getting together with a couple of my buddies, taking a short Jeep ride over to the coastline, and we went surfing! Okay? *China Beach*.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: There was a TV show called *China Beach*. That was near where I was stationed. We went—I went surfing there. It was a good break, okay?

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: Guys would go waterskiing behind their PBRs.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

COOKE: You know, it was just—it was—it was a—it was a surreal environment, in which you were, you know,—it was just very different than anything that—that—that you would

experience. And in the midst of this, we were—you know, we were in—outside of Da Nang. At this point in the history of the war, after the Tet, the war ceased to become a guerilla war between the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese government because it had—

What happened in the Tet, even though it was a huge political victory for the Viet Cong—basically, after Tet, the—the uprising failed, but all of the—the infrastructure of the Viet Cong came to the surface, because they thought they were going to take the country over. So in the—in the months following Tet, the—the CIA and the South Vietnamese Army managed to liquidate the entire Viet Cong, so by the end of the war, there is no indigenous communist revolution in most of South—South Vietnam. The war becomes a—a—a classic war between the North Vietnamese Army and the South Vietnamese Army, and it's a situation in which the North Vietnamese Army is better armed and just a—a—a—a better military organization. And once the Americans pull out their support, the South falls. That's the basic story in a nutshell.

So where I was living, you know, in—in and around a Vietnamese fishing village, no one was trying to—you know, the people who were trying to kill *me* were the—were the—were the North Vietnamese Army across the bay, right? And when we went out to our—I went to—some of our—we had a—we had a radar station on top of a place called Bastogne [pronounced bass-TONE], which was a fire base in the A Sầu Valley, if you ever studied Vietnamese military history.

And I—we would fly out there in helicopters, and I would work, you know, with the local radar guys. I remember sitting in the fire base with a pair of binoculars, watching North Vietnamese trucks running ammunition along—you know, near the Laotian border. So the war changed over the time I was there from the guerilla war into a much more formal type of warfare situation.

Most of the population I lived with—they weren't—you know, it wasn't like these poor slobs in—in Afghanistan and Iraq, where everybody's trying to kill you all the time, right? Most of the population in Da Nang—they didn't want the communists to be in the country, and they weren't

particularly trying to kill *you*, They weren't particularly happy about your being there, but I never felt, you know, the notion that—it was hardly likely that an IUD [improvised explosive device] was going to hit me as I was driving in my Jeep, you know, although I did have a couple of instances in which I went to a local barbershop and I had a Vietnamese lady barber, you know, cut my hair and then, you know, give me a shave with a straight razor, right? So you're sitting in the chair, and she lathers up and picks up the straight razor, and she's Vietnamese, right. And she's kind of shaving your—your neck.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: And [unintelligible; 2:21:33], *Do I really want to be here? Why am I doing this?* [Laughs.] You know. I doubt you'd do that right now in Iraq.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: So, [unintelligible; 2:21:43]—

MANNES: So what was—I'm sorry? Yeah. So you briefly touched on it just now, but I want to maybe hear further. Did you have a strong interaction with the local Vietnamese community? You were in a fishing village.

COOKE: Well, yes and no. At the time that we were there, Da Nang was a closed city, so—that was the major city south of where we were stationed. And the American military weren't allowed in—in Da Nang, right? That was a closed city. I interacted—I could go in because I was an adviser. I had a special adviser ID card. Most of my interactions were with my—the people that I was advising. And that was on a day-to-day basis. They were young, you know, Vietnamese mil-—you know, naval officers, and basically we would—we would work together, and you develop, you know, some kind of a—some degree of—of working friendship. You know, some of them weren't particularly interested in—in dealing with you or necessarily sharing much of their lives. Others were more friendly.

So I did not develop, you know, any—any lasting friendships, mostly I think because of the language difficulty and the fact

that at this point, you know, I was very self-protective. I was not particularly adventuresome. I rarely went out, you know, to mingle with—with my counterparts. Once or twice I would go—go over and have dinner, but I—I didn't—I wasn't aggressively engaged in trying to integrate with the local society, in part just out of fear, to be candid.

MANNES: Right.

And so you—you briefly mentioned the Easter invasion. Can you go a little more into the action you saw during that? Because it sounds like they got very close to your location.

COOKE: Well, they did, they did. And to put it in- —to describe it briefly, in probably April of 19- —April and May of 1972, the North Vietnamese Army ran—you know, invaded the South. They came around the Demilitarized Zone that separated North and South Vietnam, with about 50[,000] to 75,000 troops. One of our naval bases, where we had advisers, was right at the border, in a town called Cửa Việt. And I had the experience of, you know, being on duty when the North Vietnamese started shelling Cửa Việt.

And it readily became apparent that there was a major invasion going on, and to make a long story short—at this point, we had—we were in the middle of Viet- —so-called Vietnamization, right?—which was something that came in with [President Richard M.] Nixon's election in '68, because he had a "secret," you know, plan for ending the war, which basically was gradually turning it back over to the Vietnamese, which was just, you know, a euphemism for getting out, but getting out gradually.

So we were suddenly in a situation in which we had a lot of advisers in I Corps in the North, and we were relying upon the Vietnamese army to protect us from the North Vietnamese, and some of the North Vietnamese roll across the border, led by a—led by tanks. And Cửa Việt falls within 48 hours.

We end up sending boats north from where I was to evacuate the American advisers and as much of the local population as we could, so we—we sent a bunch of—of LSTs. It was Landing Ship, Tank. They were sort of, you

know, amphibious vessels that we had given to the Vietnamese and were still operating. So we're trying to evacuate folks—our—our—our folks up north as the North Vietnamese fight their way south. And it's sort of like a—a—a—a hot knife through butter. Within the space of a week, they have recaptured Huế, which is the imperial—the former imperial capital of South—of Vietnam, where a lot of intensive fighting had occurred during Tet.

And at—at this point, you know, we're—we're pulling troops out, right? We have our—we're pulling advisers out of some of our more northerly radar stations and watching, you know, the strategic situation about how far these guys are going to—whether the whole country is going to fall, because, you know, after the fall of Huế, the next major Vietnamese city is Da Nang, and we're north of Da Nang.

So there's a period of time in which we are essentially getting ready to pull out, right? The Americans were figuring, *Jeez, we're gonna have North Vietnamese—we're gonna have North Vietnamese tanks rolling down the street here in a couple of days.* So there are preliminary orders—preliminary orders go out, you know, to get ready to—to pack your bags, essentially.

At the same time, the American [sic; U.S.] 7th Fleet, which is still around, is massing of the—the coast of I Corps, and one of the things that I'm doing at this point is working with the American advisers to call artillery fire onto the advancing North Vietnamese troops coming down the—the coast, along the coastal area. They'd taken Cửa Việt. They'd taken Huế. But suddenly, you know, you've got a couple—another aircraft carrier or two comes over, and suddenly the entire gun line is—you know, the entire 7th Fleet is now off of the coast of North Vietnam, you know, pouring artillery fire onto the advancing North Vietnamese Army. And we're trying to coordinate with them to have that—that fire be effective.

And at the same time, we're trying to get, you know, our advisers out of there. At this point, we've already pulled our advisers out of Cửa Việt. We pull our advisers out of the Bastogne place, where I had been a couple of weeks earlier and sort of looked through the binoculars and seen the

trucks running, the North Vietnamese trucks, right? So that falls.

There is a huge movement of population down the major highway, down probably [National] Route 3, coming—all the—all the Vietnamese are fleeing south to avoid the—the communist—you know, the North Vietnamese troops, so there's this huge chaos. The Vietnamese—the South Vietnamese Army has largely collapsed. They're all in retreat. And it's kind of touch and go [laughs], right?

And then I had this incredible experience of one evening a bunch of young American [U.S.] Marine Corps officers suddenly arrive at our barracks where we were living, and they—they'd been sent up—they'd been—you know, by their superiors, to go in and to—and to man—they're going to assume leadership of the remains of the South Vietnamese Army, in particular the remains of the South Vietnamese armor, the tanks.

So I'll never forget sitting around the hooch one evening with these young second and first lieutenant Marines. The next day, they're going north, and they're going to take over these tanks and try to stop the—the North Vietnamese Army, right? And I'm thinking, *Jesus Christ! You know, these guys—they—they know they're going into this totally chaotic situation*—and these are my contemporaries right there, and we're all—you know, we're—we're 23, we're 24 years old, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: And you have to, again, put this in perspective. These are all guys—all these guys involved here are your age, right?—or pretty close, right? So you're kids, right? If you think you're grown up, you're a kid, right? You're not fully mature until your 24, right? None of them were 24. So these guys then go up and get into Vietnamese tanks and, through their—their simple bravery and the support from the 7th Fleet, they manage to stop the North Vietnamese. And the North Vietnamese essentially get trapped along the—the coastline, and for the next several weeks, the—an entire North Vietnamese Army is decimated, and they take tremendous casualties.

And that's the end of the Easter Invasion in 1972. And the reason that the Eastern Invasion failed is because the Americans still provided air support and naval gunfire support, and there were still advisers who were able to go in and provide some spine to the—the South Vietnamese Army.

What happens two years later: Same scenario, but at that point, you have [the] Watergate [scandal], you have a change in administration, you know, Gerald [R.] Ford [Jr.] is the president, and the Americans decide they're not going to support the Vietnamese, and Vietnam falls.

I was there sort of for the dress rehearsal of this, and what it—what it proved is (a) that North Vietnamese were willing to lose tens of thousands of troops to achieve their military goals, that we never really created a—a sufficiently and uniformly well-organized South Vietnamese Army to be able to resist them, and that as soon as the Americans cease to provide support, that the whole situation would collapse.

And, you know, it—it provides essentially a pattern for so many other American involvements in other kinds of foreign wars where you're trying to defend a colonial empire of the French or the British, and it's exactly what's going on, you know, in Iraq, right? As long as the Americans are there, dying, you can hold the country together. You pull the Americans out, it falls apart.

So it—it provides, I think, a—a lens into a lot of the problems of American foreign policy in terms of nation building or nation support, and it makes them very cynical about the opportunity to—to succeed in that with that kind of a strategy, and it also makes you tremendously sympathetic for the poor slobs that, you know, rely on the Americans to protect them when the Americans pull out.

I mean, that's sort of—you know, what did I see of the war? I saw the dress rehearsal for the end, you know, and I had a couple of instances in which, you know, I got shot at. I never had to, you know, advance under fire. I was certainly not, you know, you know, a grunt, you know, who was, you know—who—I think that's incredible courage, to do that. I

was—I was an adviser [chuckles], right? I was a staff adviser, you know.

But I—you know, I—I saw a lot of stuff, and I was involved, you know, sort of at one remove in—in—in combat, and, you know, it was dangerous, but it wasn't at all like the situation that, you know, my contemporaries had who were, you know, humping in the—in—in—in—in the—in the rice paddies. That was another world entirely that I fortunately avoided.

MANNES: Yeah. Did you realize at the time that you were witnessing kind of this dress rehearsal for the end, as you put it? Or was that something that kind of came to you afterwards?

COOKE: Well, I would say a lot of this is retrospect. I mean, you know, you didn't know about 1975 in 1972. But it—it did impress on me the fragility of the military situation and the essential role that, you know, the United States was playing in—in supporting the entire South Vietnamese, you know, social structure. You know, we were—we were propping them up. There was no doubt about that.

And it was also clear that, while, you know, the Vietnamese Navy wasn't a bad organization. You know, there were some competent officers that I worked with that—you know, the Vietnamese Army was just so spotty in terms of quality. And there was also, you know, a huge difference between the—the mindset of the North and the South.

You know, you were in a situation—it sort of gets you back to, you know, other examples of 20th-century history. You were fighting a totalitarian government in which there was, you know, total dominance by the Communist Party and a kind of pervasive indoctrination so that these guys were willing to lay down their lives by the tens of thousands, or were compelled to do that.

And in the South you had a very different world. It was a much more, you know, cosmopolitan world. It was a world in which there wasn't that kind of a—a—a central ideology. It was a much more corrupt political system, in some ways. So, you know, it provided a lesson about, you know, the—the power of, you know, totalitarian governments to—to

muster and to, you know, motivate people to go out and die for a certain kind of political idea, you know.

And it's not unlike, you know, dealing with ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, officially known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL]. You know, you have—you have true believers. I mean, I think of these guys who used to, you know, swim across the bay with explosives tied to themselves and then try to blow up these ships. I mean, incredible courage. Willingness to die. You know, in the end, it tells you a lot about the nature of motivation of an army. There are lots of analogies to that.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: So it was very interesting. And I think it reflects a lot of—you know, it makes one very cynical. It makes one very cynical about American foreign military involvement, you know, how—you know, what—what—what's the end game? That was the thing in Vietnam, is we never had an end game. And it's not unlike what—what—what—what's occurred in the past, in *your* lifetime in the Middle East.

MANNES: Yeah.

So how much longer were you in Vietnam after this? When did you finish, I'll ask, then?

COOKE: I—I was not there much longer. I was there until June. And then—

MANNES: Okay, so only a couple of months.

COOKE: Yeah. So I was, you know—I—and what happened was that, you know, during this period of 1971 to '72—and, again, this is interesting in terms of context—there—there's a—there's a presidential election going on, right? And Nixon is up for reelection. And one of the motivating factors in the reelection is getting Vietnam dealt with. So you have [Secretary of State] Henry [A.] Kissinger negotiating with the Vietnamese in Paris, North Vietnamese in Paris. And you have the fulfillment of the so-called Vietnamization program, in which, in order to address political pressures back in the States, Nixon decides that he's going to pull the vast majority of

Americans out of Vietnam and leave the war to the Vietnamese.

So one of the things that happens, you know, between May and June is that the—the president announces that we now have—there's now an all-volunteer American f- —that we're withdrawing our troops, no more—because the whole issue was, like, putting draftees into foreign wars, which we could—you know, which is another topic of discussion entirely. But there's an announcement by the White House that there are no longer any draftees in Vietnam; it's an all-volunteer force. And I'm there, and I'm not a volunteer [laughs], right?

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: So I end up—my mother ends up calling my congressman [laughs] and pointing out that her son is there and he's not a volunteer, and within a couple of weeks, I get called back to the—I get orders out. And, you know, basically my unit is—is largely withdrawn at that point as part of the withdrawal. Some of my—some of the guys I was there with remained—remained for another couple of months, but by—you know, within three or four months after that, the American military presence is gone from three quarters of a million to, you know, fifty or sixty thousand.

So there's, like, a huge period of American withdrawal after the—the Easter Invasion is stopped, right? And then there's a period of time in which another generation of North Vietnamese soldiers have to be trained, right? Because they just lost fifty, sixty thousand troops. They've had—they've—they've been—they've had a huge—their entire armies [unintelligible; 2:41:00] all got decimated. None of them made it back. So there's a period of [unintelligible; 2:41:05].

And then—and then you have the—the next—the next wave of it happen several years later, and then the whole thing just falls apart. And by next—

MANNES: So I'm—

COOKE: So by 1975, there are a couple of thousand Americans left in Vietnam.

MANNES: Right. I'm sure that when you were leaving Vietnam, relief was near the top of your mind, but what else were you feeling when you finally got to go home or at least back to the—the U.S.?

COOKE: Well, I mean, it was—it was elation, right? You know, I got out with my—you know, in one piece. I was—I was extremely happy. I also realized that, you know, I was now three years into a four-year military commitment. I kind of thought they'd let me out, and I applied for an early out. I wasn't given it.

But I came—coming out of a—you know, Vietnam and out of a combat situation, I had the choice of billet, so I ended up electing to do shore duty in Boston, right? And I spent my last year as an administrative officer in South Boston, you know, taking, you know, night courses at Harvard. [Chuckles.] So I was—you know, I was out. And I was, you know,—you know, I—I couldn't have been happier to be out of there.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: You know, it was a real—there was some real anxiety. And also my—it drove my parents nuts because that was a war that was so thoroughly covered by the—by the media. My parents—there was—during this period of time, when all the nasty things were happening (April, May, June), my parents were watching Walter [L.] Cronkite [Jr.], and there was a report of an American, a small naval radar station that had been overrun, right?—by the North Vietnamese. And my parents thought that was our base that had been overrun.

So my parents had the experience of calling up *CBS* [*Evening*] *News*—they couldn't get any answer from the Navy, of course—to try to find out which base exactly it was that had been overrun, to see if I was still alive or not, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So that's the kind of—you know, my—as wonderful as it was for me, it was probably more wonderful for my parents when I flew out of Da Nang, you know, on my way home.

MANNES: And what was—what was the impact of the war on your family and I guess in your relationship with your family while you were away for so long?

COOKE: Well, I—I think it only strengthened my relationship with my family. I think that coming back from that experience, there was a fundamental change in my relationship with my dad in the sense that it became sort of a marker that represented my—my full maturity in terms of the way he dealt with me. So it was just—I think he treated me much more as a—he treated me as an adult after that experience. And he—you know, he wasn't going to second guess me about things, because I had been through that experience. So in some ways, it was a watershed experience.

MANNES: Right.

Was it difficult to readjust to life, coming back?

COOKE: In retrospect, I had—I had some difficulties, yes. I was fortunate in the sense that I had this period of a year of shore duty, essentially, to depressurize, although I ended up, you know, having a near fatal car accident, having a really screwed up emotional involvement. [Chuckles.] You know, clearly there were—there were things that were still—

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: —needed to be settled, but I was blessed in the sense that when I got back, I—I—I went—I—I—I applied and got into graduate school. And after I finished my fourth year in the Navy, I went off to [the University of] Cambridge for two years, and it was like going back to Hogwarts [School of Witchcraft and Wizardry]. I mean, I had—I had a scarf. I had a bicycle. [Chuckles.] I went to a university that—you know, my college was founded in 1352. I lived in this incredible world that I'd always fantasized about.

And getting back to Dartmouth—you know, I so loved my undergraduate experience at Dartmouth that all I wanted to do when I got out of the military was to go back to school, so I had this chance to go and spend two years at Cambridge and read English at Cambridge, which was in some ways

like an extension of the time I had at Dartmouth, so I—I had this wonderful opportunity on the G.I. Bill [Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944] to—to fulfill my fantasies in a world that was as far removed from, you know, Vietnam as you can imagine. So I was very lucky. And the Navy paid for that.

MANNES: Right. And what did you end up—right. And what did you end up studying or getting your graduated degree in?

COOKE: In English literature. So I—you know, I wrote my the- —master's these on Joseph Conrad.

MANNES: Gotcha. And—

COOKE: Yes?

MANNES: That's pretty fitting, I guess, *Heart of Darkness*.

COOKE: Well, it was very fitting.

MANNES: So two significant event- —yeah. Sorry, I think the—the audio here is messing up a bit.

COOKE: Okay. Well,—

MANNES: Can you still hear me?

COOKE: Yeah, I can. Can you hear me?

MANNES: [Pause.]

COOKE: You may have [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:47:55].

MANNES: Yeah, okay, I can hear you know.

COOKE: Are you still there?

MANNES: [Pause.] Yeah, no, I'm still here. Can you hear me?

COOKE: I can hear you.

MANNES: [Pause.] Okay, great. So I—I had two significant events, kind of, after you left Vietnam. I was wondering your thoughts on

them. The first is the cease fire that the U.S. signs in 1973, and the second is—I mean, the final or the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. If I could just hear your thoughts or reactions to those when they occurred.

COOKE: Well, interesting, in—in terms of timing because that period of 1973 to 1975—I'm out of the country. I'm reading English at Cambridge, right?

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: So I'm not reading the American newspapers. I'm not watching television. I'm kind of divorced from it all. What is my reaction to the—you know, the peace negotiations and the—it's probably a pretty cynical one. You know, having been through what I went through in '72, you know, it becomes pretty clear to me that during this period of time, '73- —you know, let's mark it by Watergate, right? Post-Water- —after Nixon's—Nixon resigns, Ford becomes president, and at this point, no one in America wants to deal with Vietnam anymore. So I'm not at all surprised, certainly in '75, when the whole thing falls—I've been there, I've done that, I've seen that happen before. I've seen the—the—the lines of refugees coming south, right? So there's a certain sense of inevitability, déjà vu.

In terms of the peace treaty, you know, I don't think I ever felt that it was anything other than wallpaper, right? You're papering over the situation. You're trying to have—you know, there was this term, "peace with honor." Pretty cynical about that at the time that the people are talking about it, right? We're—we're—we're cutting out. And, you know, probably the right decision in some ways, but also the sense of—

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: —the people—you know, I think about—you know, more than others, perhaps, I think about what it means for the people that I worked with day in and day out during the time I was there. I think about these guys, you know, who have "Death to the Viet Cong" tattooed on their arms, right? I think about them a lot.

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: What have we done? What have we accomplished? You know? And I think about, you know,—I think about [William S.] "Bill" Smoyer [Class of 1967], who I was in ROTC with. I think about [J. Robert] "Robbie" Peacock [II, Class of 1968], who I played lacrosse with, the guys who died there, right? To what end? Dartmouth guys. You know, tragedy.

And, you know, look at it—and then what's interesting, to look at it in perspective, 1975 and on, the Vietnamese fight a war with the Chinese. There's a border war between China and Vietnam, which you may or may not be aware of. And they sustain 100,000 casualties fighting the Chinese.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: Right? And—and one of the major rationales for the Americans being in South Vietnam was to prevent the domino effect of the Chinese, you know, taking over Southeast Asia. So it's—it is—it is just so ripe with tragedy and irony. You know, and a stark contrast to the world that I grew up in.

MANNES: So moving on from there,—

COOKE: Yeah.

MANNES: Sorry? Yeah.

COOKE: I was just going to say, you know, a sharp contrast—

MANNES: Sorry? In start [sic; stark] contrast—I lost you after—

COOKE: Yeah, in sharp contrast to the—to this vision of the—of the post-World War II American society that I grew up in, right? We've come a long way from the world of 1964,—

MANNES: Right.

COOKE: —when everybody else in my high school had a crew cut and I went off and joined the Navy.

MANNES: Yeah. So—so into this new life, this post-Vietnam life, can you tell me a little bit about where you went, like, after you finished Cambridge with your graduate degree?

COOKE: Sure. No, I—I then ended up integrating myself into society. I—I—I got my graduate degree at Cambridge. I had a wonderful experience there. Went on and went to Harvard Law School, had a somewhat less wonderful experience there and became an attorney. And I've been practicing law since I graduated from Harvard in 1978.

And very lucky. I'm an entertainment attorney. I do motion picture and television work, and I've been very fortunate, you know, because not every job in the legal profession is so wonderful. I was—I just had good fortune.

MANNES: Yeah.

And I guess the point I want to end on now is Vietnam obviously had had a strong impact on your life., I was just wondering if this so-called specter—like, your Vietnam experience really still im- —has impacted you over the years since you've left, since you've not physically been in the region.

COOKE: Well, I—I think the answer is that it has had a continuing effect on my life, although it is an effect that has diminished over the passage of time. I used to dream a lot about it, and I don't anymore. I—I think I probably, maybe had one dream about being back in Vietnam in the past couple of years. I used to dream about it pretty frequently.

I think it's had a lasting impression in terms of my appreciation of politics. It—it's made me—it still leaves a lot of am- —ambivalent feelings about America's role in the world and American foreign policy. It's made me have a greater appreciation, certainly, for what it means to be in the military and what it means to—you know, on an individual level. And I think it's also given me a deeper awareness and sensitivity to world history. It's made me much more interested in world history and understanding how these things happen, especially in terms of America's engagement with the post-colonial Third World, right?

And, again, the analogies between Americans fighting in Vietnam, in the context of French colonialism, certainly resonates in my—my personal feelings about Americans fighting in the Middle East in the—in the wake of British and French colonialism. You know, there's the whole Sykes-Picot Treaty [sic; Agreement] at the end of the First World War that created the entire mess that we are in in the Middle East right now. And there is a kind of a tragic irony that American troops are once again dying because of what European powers did in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and even earlier, in what we call the Third World.

It's very—it raises a lot of interesting questions. I—I remain very ambivalent about the Vietnam experience, about what it means, and it's made me much less certain about—about politics, you know, generally. I—I think, you know, it also had a profound effect on me in terms of understanding who I am as a person [chuckles], right?—you know, how scared I can be.

MANNES: Yeah.

COOKE: I've only been that scared once or twice in the rest of my life.

MANNES: Okay. Well, great. Yeah. So I—that's—that was my—the last question I wanted to ask you. If you have any final thoughts or reflections that you would like to share, please feel free.

COOKE: Sure. I—I guess I—I would—I would share these thoughts: that my—my four years at Dartmouth, through happenstance, occurred at a period of tremendous change in American society, especially with Americans—American youth. I think that Vietnam was a part, and a very important part, of that sea change in the way Dartmouth students reacted to themselves and reacted to the world around them.

I—I would observe that Dartmouth was an extremely protective place, but it was also a place that, during that period of time, more than I think it had in the past 30 or 40 years, opened itself out to change in the world in a different sort of way. I—some of my closest friends from Dartmouth were in ROTC with me, and we all had—all took different roads.

I think in terms of the overall American experience that, you know, Vietnam remains, for those of us who experienced it, certainly a seminal part of our lives. I think for your generation, oddly enough, it's become much akin to the way the First World War was for my generation. I remember as a young boy hearing my grandfather talk about the life in the trenches in the First World War, and I suddenly realized, given the age differences, that my talking about being in a fishing village in Vietnam is not unlike that kind of a distant and retrospect vision into another—into another world.

I'm encouraged by the fact that Dartmouth is engaging with this. I think that—I'm encouraged by the fact that I think students at Dartmouth are more aware of what it means to—to elect to be in the military, to serve in that kind of environment. And I hope that, you know, this project that you're working on, you know, becomes part of the historical record and also remains available for, you know, Dartmouth students in coming generations to see how their peers, who were part of a different Dartmouth, you know, made the transition from Hanover, you know, to the wide, wide world and, you know, how we dealt, each of us individually, with a real set of fundamental changes in our—in our society.

I remember thinking, during my years at Dartmouth, that the world *was* changing. The world was changing profoundly. And it was both because of the nature of what was happening in foreign policy but also because of what was happening culturally.

And, again, I mentioned earlier in this conversation, music. I think that if you look at American contemporary music from 1965 to 1969, the speed and the diversity and the power of change was really remarkable, and I think that part of made it so remarkable was the fact that it reflected these huge sea changes in society that surrounded Hanover. And one of the ways that really came to—you know, to affect us as students was through the music we were listening to and the issues that that music was dealing with.

So I think that's—that was going to be my summary. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. You know, I—I'm sure there are lots of very, very different—

MANNES: Of course. Thank you very much.

COOKE: It was my pleasure. You know, and if you need anything for follow-up, you know where I am. I'm happy to help.

MANNES: Of course. Thank you.

COOKE: Okay. Cheers.

[End of interview.]