Douglas O. Cooper '63
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

HUNTER: Good afternoon. Today's Wednesday, May 2nd, 2018. This is Ali Hunter ['19] speaking from the Ticknor Room in Rauner Special Collections Library on the campus of Dartmouth College [Hanover, NH]. I'm on the phone with Doug Cooper. Hi Doug, would you mind telling me where you're speaking from?

COOPER: Yeah. I am at my home, which is at 39 Brandon Place in Rocky River, Ohio. It is a second ring suburb west of Cleveland, Ohio.

HUNTER: Great. Thank you so much for being here today and being willing to share your experiences with us. So, I'd like to start off with some basic background. Would you mind stating when and where you were born?

COOPER: I was born in Lakewood, Ohio, which is one suburb closer to downtown Cleveland east of here, on March 27, 1941.

HUNTER: And would you mind stating your parents' names?

COOPER: Yeah, my father's name is Wesley Paul Cooper, and he went by Paul Cooper. "W. Paul" was the name that you might find if you're looking for it. And my mother is Cecile Meyer Cooper. Her middle name was Rose. Meyer is her maiden name. M-e-y-e-r.

HUNTER: Got it, great, thanks. Can you tell me a little bit about them, like their occupations and anything that you might find…

COOPER: Yeah. They both graduated from West High School, a public high school in the city of Cleveland. My father did not go to college, but went to Cleveland College night school, and then when he was in business, went to a 90-day Harvard Business School, coincidentally during the time I was in Hanover. He joined the Cleveland Swiss Drill Company shortly after graduating high school. He was a clerk in the time office, and he spent his entire career, unlike most of us today, at the same company. And when he retired, and I forget the date that he retired, but it was sometime in the

1980s, he was the Chief Executive Officer of that company. It had merged with National Acme, Cleveland Swiss Drill did, and became ACME-Cleveland [Corp.], which was listed on the New York Stock Exchange for a number of years beginning in 1968. Mom was a housewife, which was a big job because there were six kids. I'm the oldest. And there were three boys and two girls.

HUNTER: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? Sounds hectic with six kids.

COOPER: Yeah, well, it was a great childhood, as I think back on it. We lived in an apartment first couple places. My folks bought a home before the end of the Second World War in the city of Cleveland. I lived there until 1950. Then we moved to Parma, Ohio, which is a Cleveland suburb south of the city, where I graduated from high school, Parma Senior High School, in 1959. My childhood was great. You know, I think back on it, relatively speaking, there were a lot of advantages that we had even though we weren't rolling in dough, but it was a nice time. And my brothers and sisters more or less got along, [laughter] in spite of ourselves.

HUNTER: [Laughter] That's good to hear. How did you spend your time in high school? Did you do sports or music?

COOPER: Music was my thing. I played drums. And I was in the band, the concert band and the marching band, and in the orchestra. I also had a percussion position in the community orchestra, the Parma Philharmonic, of all things, which was, you know, just sort of an ad hoc thing brought together. Our concert master, there were some pretty fine musicians there, and our concert master, a fellow named Bert Fine, sat second chair with the Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Hall, downtown Cleveland. So, it was a good group. I also played in a couple of dance bands, and we'd go out and play, you know, Polish wedding receptions and Ukrainian picnics, which is kind of incidental to the demographics of Cleveland at the time. Had a good time doing that.

HUNTER: Good. How aware of politics and current events that were going on in the world were you during high school? Was it something that kind of affected your childhood?

COOPER: Um, boy, not that I think of. Coincidentally, I had lunch today with a bunch of my guys in my class. We get together once a

month for just a lunch and talk about old times, talk about current political things as we did today, which is kind of uncommon for us. But we were thinking back on how good things were in the ‘50s. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was President. We had the Cold War bringing up. I remember distinctly when I first heard about Sputnik was a Friday evening, I was in my band uniform and we were out there ready to march around, and everybody’s pointing up at the sky trying to find the first satellite that the Russians put up. But, you know, that kind of rattled everybody’s cage, and there was a good bit of effort to ramp up math and science at the school level, because *wow, we’re behind the Russians, we can’t let that happen*, so… It was the height of the Cold War at the time.

HUNTER: I’m just kind of curious. Would you mind elaborating a little bit more about what you meant by how good things were in the ‘50s?

COOPER: Well, gas was 25¢ a gallon. [Laughter] We seemed to have a lot of freedom. There wasn’t a whole lot of concern. It was the beginning of rock ‘n roll. A lot of the folks that I hung around with at the time were pretty much into Fats Domino and Little Richard, so pop music was an important part of growing up at the time. I just remember it generally being a good time. That’s hard to be more particular than that, I guess. But, there didn't seem to be—you know, it was sort of the beginning of civil rights, but the ‘60s brought a lot more tumult in that regard with the demonstrations and the riots and so on and so forth, including some at Cleveland. So, that was in the future and we didn’t anticipate it at that time.

HUNTER: Was anyone in your family in the military or did you have a conception of the military as you were growing up?

COOPER: I really had little conception of it. My uncle had served in World War II. He was an engineer, and so he was involved primarily in map making. He was not a front line combatant, but had spent some time in North Africa, and then I think moved on into mainland Europe after the Normandy invasion, and may have spent some time in Italy. But, Uncle Herb did not talk much about his time there. I don’t think he had a lot of trauma or what is now known as post-traumatic stress, known then, I think, as shell shock, so that was not part of the experience I had. Of course, I had neighbors, our next-door neighbor when we were living in Cleveland had

been in the Navy, and I think he'd served on a destroyer, but I'm not altogether sure about that. And don't recall having conversations with him or hearing him tell stories about his time of active duty during the Second World War.

HUNTER: So, from high school into this time, how did you end up coming to Dartmouth or making that transition?

COOPER: That was interesting. At the time we thought that no one from Parma Senior High School had ever gone to Dartmouth. That turned out to be incorrect. There was a fellow named Nelson Abrahamson who had graduated from Parma and had gone to Dartmouth and graduated there, but it was not well known at the time. There was a great guy, a Dartmouth alum who was an ordained at the time Congregational minister, and he had a little congregation inside of Cleveland, and he came out to Parma and interviewed a bunch of friends of mine, but not me. And, so I got talking with these friends and they said, "Gees, this sounds really interesting." We didn't know Dartmouth from Adam's ox at the time. And, so my friend said, "Look, he's having a reception at his parsonage. Why don't you come along?" So I did. And one thing led to another and I applied and ended up getting in.

I went up to Dartmouth with a high school classmate of mine, Duane [P.] Landreth ['63] (L-a-n-d-r-e-t-h). He and I had been fraternity brothers in our little high school fraternity, and ended up being fraternity brothers at Dartmouth at Bones Gate. Duey, I think in his junior year stepped out at Dartmouth, but then went back afterwards and got his degree. He also coincidentally went into the Navy after I did. We did not serve together, and we haven't shared stories about our experiences in the service.

HUNTER: So, you graduate high school and you're heading up to Dartmouth. Did you have any idea what was in store for you, or what were your expectations that were going to come from college?

COOPER: I knew I was scared to death academically. I thought this place is at a far higher level than I had experienced in high school, which was for me, you know, I studied reasonably well, but not as hard as I ended up studying at Dartmouth and busting my hump up there. I mean, it was pretty tough. But, it worked out okay. I managed to hit the dean's list once.

And I also was a history major coincidentally, modern European primarily.

HUNTER: Cool.

COOPER: Yeah, so I enjoyed that a lot. And that's an interesting story, too. We were on quarters then. We didn't have the year-round summer term experience that you guys now have. But, in my spring quarter my freshman year, there was a professor that was very highly regarded and well-loved by the students named [Lewis D.] Herb Stilwell, and he was teaching modern American history from the Civil War up to the present day. And he was retiring and everybody wanted to get that class. So I signed up trying to get Stilwell's modern American history. I did not get Stilwell. I got DeMariey [spelling unconfirmed]. And I was not looking at a history major. I was thinking maybe chemistry or I didn't know what at that time. But I was so taken by DeMariey's history class, that kind of put me on the path to a history major.

HUNTER: Cool. So, did you have any idea that you were going to end up serving in the military during that first year?

COOPER: Not during the first year. The way I got into the military… and at that time the draft was not active. It was in my senior year, and I frankly was not sure what I was—I didn't have a clear vision of a career path. So, I figured at some point I might be subjected to military service, so I thought instead of waiting for the shoe to drop, I signed up. And I had talked with a couple of my fraternity brothers, one of whom, [Vincent P.] Vin Di Figlia ['63], and I both signed up for Naval Officer Candidate School (I was not in ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] at Dartmouth), but with the deferred active duty date of September of '63, after I graduated and had a little summer job and played around and did that stuff after graduation, and then went off to OCS in September of '63.

HUNTER: Right. So if we could just rewind a little bit. How did you spend your time at Dartmouth? What were your activities?

COOPER: I started off freshman year in the marching band, again playing drums, and I joined the rugby club, and I played rugby fall and spring I think for all four years I was there. I was on the C team. I wasn't one of those guys who made the big trips, you know, that they still do, I guess, with the

so-called A team. But, I loved doing that. I joined a fraternity the beginning of my sophomore year, Bones Gate. We were the first class to pledge Bones Gate when it became independent. It had been Delta Tau Delta nationally, but at the time the college had required that any racial or other discriminatory clause be eliminated from the fraternities' I don't know whether they'd be bylaws or charters or whatever. Well, apparently, Delta Tau Delta tried to get that changed nationally without success, and so they went local. And at the time, national fraternity affiliations were not a big deal at Dartmouth, and I'm pretty sure they're not now either. So, it was an easy transition for them.

But again, I didn't have my heart set on going to that house. There was one guy that I had high regard for who'd been living in the dorm at New Hamp [New Hampshire Hall] with me, and not with me but in the same neck of the woods. And I went over to see him. And I just liked the guys. So, joined the fraternity. That was a pretty important feature of my time at Dartmouth. I was recording secretary and house manager, not the president or the rush chairman or any of those big ticket offices, but was very actively engaged in what was going on in the house.

So, beyond that, let's think if there were other things I was doing. Oh, I was, what did they call it, the undergraduate council, UBC [acronym unconfirmed]? I'm trying to think of it. But I was one of the reps from New Hampshire Hall where I was living for the first three years. I lived in the house the last year. And I was on that, but not a very active participant in undergraduate student government.

HUNTER: Great. So, over this time where there any things that were filtering back from Vietnam? Obviously, this is sort of very early stages, and it's kind of things like [President John F.] Kennedy just sending advisors and things like that. But, were there any news coming back or was it not really something that people talked about?

COOPER: I don't recall there being any discussion of Vietnam. I mean, it was just sort of moderate Cold War stuff. And there really wasn't much discussion. And I have no recollection of that, in any event, so…

HUNTER: Well, you would have been—were you on campus in 1962? You would have been in your sophomore year? Correct me if I'm wrong.

COOPER: Let's see, '62.

HUNTER: Junior year?

COOPER: A junior, I think.

HUNTER: So, for example, the Cuban Missile Crisis, was that something that sort of shook things up a bit more?

COOPER: Yeah, I remember that. There wasn't—I don't recall a whole lot of activity there. What I do remember, there were a lot of space launches. We were playing catch-up to the Russians, you know, with the space program. And I remember times when there would be concern about how this launch was going to go and whether the shot was going to be successful, so on and so forth.

HUNTER: So, as you said earlier, I'd love you to elaborate a little bit more. As you're coming into junior year, you said you didn't really have any concrete plans for what you were going to do after graduation?

COOPER: Right.

HUNTER: How did you spend that last year with regards to that, then?

COOPER: Well, I'd kind of put to rest the question of what to do after graduation by enlisting. I enlisted, I don't know, February or March of my senior year. I had a senior seminar in history dealing with the French Revolution, and so, I frankly just kind of enjoyed my senior year, took some good classes, still was playing rugby. I wasn't in the marching band anymore. After a couple of football seasons, I dropped out of that, so…

HUNTER: Right. So, can you talk to me a little bit more about your decision to enlist?

COOPER: Well, one of the things that we talked about, Vinnie [spelling unconfirmed] and I, was, you know, it's not the worst thing to give something back to the country. We were all pre-Baby Boomers, you know. I have very vague recollections as a kid being out in a car and having the air raid warnings go on

where we had to pull over to the side of the road to abide by the air raid warning. So, we all knew about World War II. We'd gone through Korea, and I was very mindful of that at the time in the early '50s as to what was going on there. As a matter of fact, my next-door neighbor and I, Ralphy Nichols, put on our little cartridge belts and helmets and whatever we had and walked down to the end of the street to salute General [Douglas] MacArthur when he came back through Cleveland after being fired by Truman, when he was at the time the head of our forces in Korea and really the commander-in-chief of that military effort in the Korean Peninsula.

HUNTER: And what drew you to the Navy in particular?

COOPER: I think the "Join the Navy, see the world" had a lot to do with it. That's not a very sophisticated [laughter] reason, I suppose. But I also liked the officer candidate approach that they had.

HUNTER: Can you elaborate a little bit what you mean by that?

COOPER: Well, it was going to be continuing education. The Navy would expect a lot of you, I think intellectually, from the standpoint of ship driving, for example, the intelligence aspect of it, and the technical things like fire control radars and the gun systems and so on and so forth. So, I was interested primarily in that, as opposed to infantry type things that you might get, and you would get if you joined either Army or the Marine Corps. I thought a little bit about the Air Force, but then I don't think my eyes were good enough to let me get me in there to do any good in an airplane. So the Navy seemed to me to be the best choice.

HUNTER: And you said you made that decision after the draft occurring a little more, was that sort of a big feature that was happening on campus?

COOPER: No, I don't think I was trying to avoid the draft as much as I was looking for something worthwhile to do after getting out of Dartmouth.

HUNTER: Right. Are there any moments from your senior year that you find sort of particularly poignant in what would happen after, or just looking back on it now?

COOPER: I don't think so. I don't think so. Not from the standpoint of my military service experience.

HUNTER: From any standpoint?

COOPER: No. Huh-uh.

HUNTER: Okay, so 1963, you're graduating. Can you tell me a little bit about where your head was at? What did you do right after graduation?

COOPER: Well, I had had summer jobs at a local swim club, and there were some good young people there my age and I was hanging out with them. That's actually where I met my wife. And I was just running a snack bar. We worked seven days a week, probably 10 hours a day, but we're hanging around with some fun people, so that was a good time. Meanwhile, I'm starting to do things to prepare for Officer Candidate School. The Allied [Maritime] Tactical Signal [and Maneuvering] Book uses signal flags, and it was important to learn those, and so I spent some time doing that.

I was in a wedding of one of my fraternity brothers, Charlie Parton [Charles T. Parton '63], in New Jersey, and drove over there, and I took my wife—or at least she wasn't my wife then, but she was to become my wife—and we drove over because my wife had been to Dartmouth for Green Key and Winter Carnival a couple of times and knew Charlie Parton and his wife, Trudy, and so the two of us drove to New Jersey for the wedding. And on that trip she was quizzing me on the flags. [laughter] So, that's just a little piece of connection. But other than that, I wasn't thinking much about OCS, except for just the logistics of I was going to drive over there in my car, stopped by Brooklyn to pick up Vin Di Figlia, and then we were going up to Newport [RI].

HUNTER: So that happens. What was the transition into OCS like?

COOPER: It was a little different being in the military. I mean, you're marching around. You're not just ambling as we did up to then. [Laughter] It was interesting. They divided us into sections, and the sections were maybe 25, 30 guys in a section, and we went class to class as sections. And Vin Di Figlia was my roommate. There were four of us in a room, two double bunk beds. And another fraternity brother, classmate, [L.] Bruce Coffey ['63], was also, just

coincidentally, in our section. Vinnie and I were put in that section because we checked in together, having driven up together. So the transition, I guess, was kind of getting used to the military regimen. Everybody gets up at the same time, you all run in there and try to get shaved before you go to breakfast, and that kind of stuff, so… and keeping your uniform squared away. The classes were, I thought, not overwhelming, but they were not just chump change either, you know. There were some challenges academically that you had to pay attention to.

HUNTER: What kind of training were you doing? What was sort of an average day like?

COOPER: Well, we'd get up, we'd go to—I forget now even what we called it—but we'd all line up for inspection, and people would check our uniforms, and you'd get gigs, as they said, if your uniform wasn't quite right, and if you'd get so many gigs, you had to do what they called EMI, which is extra military instruction, and what that meant was you grabbed a rifle and you marched around on a grinder, you know, or a football field for an hour or so for each so many gigs that you got. And the effort was to try to avoid those, of course. But then after breakfast, you'd go back to the room and get freshened up, and then off you go to class. You'd form out in front of the barracks and march over to the classroom building. And you'd go up and there would be, say, seamanship or navigation or engineering or operations, various classes that they'd give you to try to make you understand what the Navy was all about and what your position as an officer would be.

HUNTER: And what did you, at this point in time what did you sort of see would be your position? Or did you have a conception of where you thought you were going to go or end up being deployed?

COOPER: Well, it kind of evolved. They did say, "For those of you who want to give it a try, we're always looking for pilots to fly planes on and off of carriers," you know, fighters and bombers and torpedo planes and that kind of thing. And I pretty quickly decided that was not for me. I was interested, though, in trying to get something that would be the most challenging, I'll say, or the most, even though I wasn't planning on a military career, the most career advancing. And for me and for several of us, including Vinnie,

destroyers was it. Destroyers are small combatants. Compared to a carrier which at the time were maybe 90,000 plus tons, destroyers were 4,000. Mine was a 4,000 ton. The World War II cans were 2,250 or 2,100 tons, so much smaller ships. You'd have a complement of maybe, say, 250 with maybe 18 to 22 officers. So, the responsibilities that you would have to bear as one of those officers, particularly a junior officer, was pretty intense. So you were going to be put to the task of doing as much as you could, and putting your knowledge to work in a pretty important way. So that's why I opted for destroyers. And I'm not sure when that came about during the however many months I was there, three or four.

HUNTER: I'm also just curious, you said that you didn't think you wanted a military career. Was there a particular reason for that?

COOPER: Not necessarily. There wasn't a great aversion to the military. I just thought I would like to do something that was frankly more lucrative and more conducive to raising a family. I ended up proposing to my wife during Thanksgiving break. We drove up to Hanover actually, and over the phone, [laughter] talking to her parents and mine, got engaged, and we were married December 28 of '63 during our Christmas leave time away from OCS.

HUNTER: Wow, cool. So, and then, of course, during this time the Vietnam War is sort of ramping up a little bit more. Did you think at this point that you were going to end up in the West Pacific?

COOPER: I did not, frankly. We weren't all that—at least I wasn't all that mindful of Vietnam at the time. I was mainly concentrating on trying to get through OCS. There was a question of rolling out or washing out because by that time you were on active duty and you were an E-2, which is a seaman apprentice pay grade wise. So you're an enlisted man as an officer candidate. Once you get commissioned, of course, you're an officer, an ensign, which is an O-1 pay grade. But, there was that concern that if I didn't measure up academically, I was going to be in the fleet. And I didn't want any part of that. Not that that's a bad thing, but it certainly wouldn't have done anything for my career to have been, you know, a deck sailor on some fleet oiler or something, you know. That just didn't appeal. But as far as a long-term career, I was primarily

thinking, you know, the military does move you around a lot, it restricts your lifestyle, there's a lot of separation from wife and children, and so, that did not appeal to me, although we went through it for three-and-a-half years of marriage while I was on active duty.

HUNTER: So, what was the next step after OCS? When did you find out that you were moving?

COOPER: Well, we got our orders, oh, maybe a month before we were commissioned. So I knew where I was going. And my thought was, what I had requested, I wanted a small combatant, which means destroyer, I wanted it out of San Diego [CA] because by that time my wife and I had linked up. San Diego [State] University [San Diego, CA] had a good teaching program and my wife was on a career to be a schoolteacher. And I thought, *Okay, if she can come out there with me, I can be on the ship, she can be going to San Diego State, and life will be wonderful*. And that worked, and she started at San Diego State, I got out to the Navy, reported to board my ship in March of '64, she got in and lined up with some courses at San Diego State, and off we went. So that worked out. I basically got what I wanted out of the military when they were casting around for, you know, "Give us your wish list. What do you want to do when you get your commission?"

HUNTER: Can you tell me a little bit about your first impressions of being on the ship, and a bit about the ship, as well?

COOPER: Yeah, first the ship, that's the easy part. USS *Morton* DD-948 was a new construction relatively speaking at the time. It was commissioned in 1959, so it had been afloat at the time for under five years. It, as I say, displaced a little over 4,000 tons, it's about 418 feet long, it's got a beam which is the breadth of it at the widest point of 45 feet. It had—at the time it was an all gun destroyer. At the time they were beginning to come out with missiles, anti-air missiles on some destroyers, and also what they called ASROC, which were anti-submarine rockets, and they were positioned on some ships, but not on mine. So, I was on a ship that was really very much behind its time from the standpoint of its technology, at least from the standpoint of the weapon selection. But, the radars and the fire control systems were pretty advanced compared to what had been going on in the Second World War and Korea.

So, the ship, as I say, had a crew of about 250, maybe 260 or -70. We were always a little short. It just seemed to be the way it was at the time. And for some reason, we ended up with at least—it ebbed and flowed because people were transferred on and off the ship. Usually an officer billet is two years, but as a Reserve officer with no indication that I was thinking of a career in the Navy, they left me on that same ship for over three years, which for me was great. I'm trying to think what else to tell you about the ship. Our captain was named Tom Slattery. He was, you know, a rollicking Irishman, I would phrase it, and a hell of a destroyer skipper, and the officers and crew really looked up to him. I mean, he was the classic man-of-warsman, as they say. So…

HUNTER: Sorry, go ahead.

COOPER: No, you go ahead. You go ahead.

HUNTER: Can you just give me an idea of what your position was or your daily life? Like what would you do while you were on in port?

COOPER: Okay, my billet, which was my job assignment, when I started off, I was 1st Division Officer. 1st Division are the deck seamen. They are the guys who run the ships' boats. They tend to the top side spaces, maintain those, the anchors as well as the boats and some of the other things. They're probably less technical than a lot of the other divisions. 2nd Division, for example, were gunners' mates. Fox Division was at the time a combination of sonarmen, the guys who ran the sonar gear, and the anti-submarine weapons like torpedoes and hedgehogs and depth charges. The gunners' mates ran the guns. We had a main battery of three 5-inch rapid fire mounts, and twin 3-inch 50s, two twin mounts. In other words, there are two barrels on each of those mounts, both of which were mounted on the O-1 level, which is one deck above the main deck. The main battery to those, the one forward and the one aft, were on the main deck, and then the other was on the O-1 level one deck above.

After that, I moved through a number of things. I became 1st lieutenant for a while because we had a number of officers when we deployed, which was in August of '64, to the Western Pacific. I became the assistant navigator and ship secretary. After coming back, I ended up as effectively

assistant weapons officer. The weapons officer is a department head on the ship. There's an operations officer, an engineering officer, the weapons officer, a supply officer, and I'm probably forgetting one. But, those are just under the executive officer in line of command or chain of command of the ship. So, at the time I then became fire control and main battery officer, which meant I had responsibility for the gunfire control systems, the radars and the computers that would generate gun orders, and the guns themselves. And in that capacity, I was active most of my time on board, including the '66 cruise. We took a cruise in 1966 at which point we did most of our gunfire support shooting in support of troops on the ground in Vietnam.

HUNTER: Was there a particular one of these positions that you enjoyed the most?

COOPER: Yeah, I liked very much being assistant "weaps". I thought that was really challenging. And I was fortunate, because in the two divisions that I had—I was division officer for both Fox and 2nd Division—I had two chiefs in each of those divisions, chief petty officers. And chief petty officers, as you may know, pretty much are the heart of the Navy's operations. I mean, these are career enlisted guys who know what they're doing, and these guys certainly did. And so, I had all the technical support from these chief petty officers that were there, which is probably why they assigned them there. They knew Cooper was gonna be out there having this job [laughter] and "you better get somebody to help him," you know. But, that was productive.

I didn't get into battle stations. You shift into different roles when you go to general quarters, or battle stations. And I had a couple of positions. I was the second director officer, which means I'm sitting in a little box that's up on the top with the radar on top that tracks targets and is the source of information for the fire control computers that generates gun orders. That was okay, but my primary billet was gunnery liaison officer, or GLO, and I was in combat information center doing that, and on a set of headphones talking to gun control, each of the two director officers in the plotting rooms where the computers were generating the gun orders. They in turn were communicating with the guns as far as directions to fire and so on and so forth. But, the battle station, the GLO battle station, was something that was pretty important, and I enjoyed doing that.

In addition, we also stood watches. I don't think I mentioned that. But in addition to doing what I would call the administrative work of being a division officer, we stood watches on the bridge. I started off as the junior officer of the deck, and qualified as a formation steaming officer of the deck, which meant I was the guy in charge when I had the deck. And we stood watches, roughly speaking, four hours on and eight hours off. So the eight hours you slept, you ate, you did your administrative work as I call it, you're running your divisions and seeing to the training of the troops, maintenance of the equipment and the spaces and so forth. But, standing watches, you were up there trying to be sure the ship was going in the right direction and that you were staying in formation with the other ships that you were in company with, if you were. So that was an important part of the time that you would spend on board a ship when you're underway. You also stood watches in port, but that, of course, was less challenging and demanding than when you were underway.

HUNTER: Was there a particularly sort of standout memory to you during this time? I know that you sent me some materials that spoke about this era.

COOPER: Yeah. I think if they were to pick just one thing, it would be October 18, '64.

HUNTER: Sorry, I was talking about the port in San Diego.

COOPER: Oh, in San Diego? Not so much in San Diego. We did some training. We went to firefighting school. We'd take the—the officers would be assigned along with the enlisted to go do firefighter training, so we did that. Other than that, it was maintenance of the equipment. And we would get underway from time to time for maybe four days out of a week to go out and do local ship exercises. It would be gunnery exercises. You'd be shooting at either a sled that was towed by a tug or a sleeve that was dragged by an airplane, and you'd do anti-air firing at that sleeve. You'd do underway replenishment so that you could get fuel oil while you were underway, and also food and supplies, and materials if you needed them. Navy does a lot of that, probably still, where instead of just loading things from the dock, which we did a lot of, you'd go alongside a fleet oiler or an ammunition ship, or just a provision ship to take on food and supplies and material. So

we would do those things in preparation for the deployment, because underway replenishment was something we did. Particularly off Vietnam in ’66, we did quite a bit of that, because we were too far away from a port that could be providing us with that kind of support.

HUNTER: And a couple of minutes ago you mentioned Captain Slattery and that all the people looked up to him. Could you explain a little bit more about why that is?

COOPER: Not quite sure. I mean, he was just… he cared about his troops, for one thing, so he was loyal and supported them. He wanted to be sure that they had every opportunity to advance in pay grade and in rank within the Navy, so he was good about doing that. He also was social. I mean, he would get the officers in the wardroom and we’d go have what they call a beer muster after we came into port after being at sea for a few days or a week. He was just a good charismatic leader, for the lack of a better phrase.

HUNTER: And I’m going to bring up something that you sent me in your statement, but Downwind?

COOPER: [Laughter] Yeah, right. Yeah, Downwind. Little story there. One of the things we were doing, we were scouting for a test of a rocket that was to be fired from submarines. So there was a submarine out there, it was off San Clemente Island, which is an island off of the coast of southern California. And we were out there retrieving these things that the submarine was shooting, and they were doing tests and so on and so forth. Well, at night there was this little Quonset hut officers’ club, and the captain would go and grab as many officers who wanted to go, which included most of them, and they’d go over and have a few beers and then come back.

Well, he came back one night. I had had the watch, so I wasn’t with them, but I had I think the mid-watch, so I was in the rack, and this wide-eyed messenger of the watch comes and wakes me up, said, “The captain wants to see you in the wardroom.” I said, “Oh, God.” ‘Cause the way he got over to San Clemente was by boat, and at that time I was responsible for the ship’s boats, and I thought, *Uh oh, the boat’s crapped out and there’s a problem*. So I went up there and, you know, threw on what passed for the uniform of the day, walked into the wardroom, and here’s all these guys sitting around, Captain at the head of the table in the

wardroom, and he says, “You’re the boat officer.” And I said, “Yes, sir, I am.” But he didn’t say “boat.” He said “goat.” One of the things that they had done when they were over there having their beers was talk to a bunch of Marines into tracking down one of the native goats that was running around there on the island, and bring it to the ship. So he brings it to the ship, you know, three or four days later, and I’m assigned the duty as the goat officer.

So, I set up these three watch sections. I had three goat kings, you know, one from each duty section so that they could be tending to the goat and be sure he had enough food, and we had to find a place to put him. He got put into what was then the potato locker on the O-1 level by the after 3-inch mount. It was actually a hot shell casing, but they used it to store potatoes. And so we cleared that all out and put the goat in there. And the signalman, who spent a lot of their time stitching up the signal flags, made him a little coat, and put the ship’s badge on it. And we would parade this goat. He got underway with us. And we’d be replenishing alongside an oiler and one of the guys would be parading this goat back and forth. So, it was a lot of fun and there were some fun stories.

But, two things happened. One, change of command. We got a different captain. Slattery left and John McGill relieved him as CO. Second thing that happened is, we knew this was going to happen but we came up on our deployment, and it turned out that if we went over there with the goat on board the ship, and you pull into the Philippines or Taiwan or Japan or Hong Kong, the whole ship would be quarantined for 30 days, which means the crew would get no liberty. So, what we ended up doing was, we kind of nudged our way into the San Diego Zoo to accept this goat as a donation, if you will, from the Navy. So we put poor Downwind in the San Diego—they didn’t put him in the children’s zoo because by that time he was getting a little feisty. He would run around and he was growing horns and he was butting into people, and they didn’t want him in the children’s zoo. So they put him out in just a general paddock in the San Diego Zoo. And that was the end of Downwind, and we got underway for Western Pacific without a goat, which is all to the good.

HUNTER: Did you say that his name was Downwind?

COOPER: Downwind, yeah. Now, Downwind, we didn't say this much at the time, but it's long since critical. Downwind was our call sign, which was confidential. In other words, when you're doing talk between ships, radio, for example, if you're out working with the *Constellation*, they would get up on the radio and say, "Downwind, this is War Chief." War Chief, if I remember correctly, was *Constellation*'s call sign. And so, rather than name the ship, they have these call signs that were different. So, we snuck through a little breach of protocol by naming the goat our classified name, call sign.

HUNTER: Why did you do that?

COOPER: Well, I don't know. I forget now who made that decision. I think it was kind of just by acclamation. We figured out, well, that's what we'll name the goat. It was easy to remember, I think, for one thing. And they all went along with it.

HUNTER: And everyone liked the goat?

COOPER: Some did, some didn't. Most did. Most thought it was kind of a cute idea and something different, you know. But that was a very different time. It wasn't the time of the '66 cruise or after our Tonkin Gulf incident in September. That changed a lot of the way things were done. My summer in San Diego in '64 was basically during peacetime, and we didn't go to a war footing until we got underway on August 5 of '64, which if I remember correctly, was the first day we bombed North Vietnam. That changed a lot of things. And, if you look at the *San Diego Union*—you guys can probably look in the archives online and see this—on August 6th there are articles about our ship getting underway. And it had been scheduled since before I had gotten my commission, so it's not like after the Tonkin Gulf incident the few days before, we all fleet up and get out of the harbor and go over there and start raising hell. It had been scheduled as a deployment in the ordinary course of a Cold War service.

But, coincidentally, in addition to the article of the *San Diego Union*, there's a picture, and there were about a dozen ships that all got underway together, most of them destroyers. There was the *Columbus*, which was a guided missile cruiser, and I think the *Kawishiwi*, which is a fleet oiler. All got underway the same day, one after the other, and they just happened to get a picture of the *Morton*, my ship. So, if you're interested to take a look at that, you'll see the

August 6th, ’64 edition of the *San Diego Union* has my ship right on the front there.

HUNTER: Yeah, I’ll definitely take a look. So, when you were getting ready to go to the West Pacific, how were you feeling, other than sad of having to leave Downwind behind? [laughter]

COOPER: Well, Downwind, I was just as happy to get rid of Downwind. I was very sad about leaving my bride of just a few months, and she certainly was not happy, because that deployment was for six months. So that’s a long time to be separated as newlyweds, or as any weds, you know. It doesn’t matter whether newly or not. A little bit apprehensive. Things are getting nasty out there and we didn’t know quite what to expect. I think I was more concerned about the homefront. I thought, *My God, we’re gonna steam over here and start the Third World War*, the Cold War being what it was at the time. So, that was a little bit of a concern.

HUNTER: And what was the journey over there like?

COOPER: It was pretty meaningful, actually. First of all, we were in a formation in a big circular screen around the oiler and the cruiser, and they were running these little drills, like “man overboard” drills, but they weren’t telling us they were drills. So, we were—I remember steaming around one time and there was a cruiser reported a man overboard and we thought it was the real thing, and it was in the middle of the night, and so two ships go charging over there to get it. And then they announced it was a drill and we all sorted itself out and off we went. We first went to Pearl Harbor, and that was pretty significant because we pulled in, and for some reason, we had some sort of need for repair or waiting for materials to install something, and so we were late departing, and everybody else left a day before we did. We stayed over one night. We’re only there for two or three days, again getting briefing from the seven fleet forces that were there, the headquarters of—we were chopping the seventh fleet. We’re first fleet when we’re alongside the coastal US, and seventh fleet when we’re in Western Pacific. So, there’s a different chain of command and organization. So we were doing some briefing and so forth, but we’re also waiting.

And so we get underway the next day very early, and we happened to be on the far easternmost part of Pearl Harbor. And to get out of there we went past the *Arizona* memorial,

all by ourselves, just one ship, it's very early in the morning, the sea smoke is rising off the harbor water, and it's very chilling. And when a Navy ship is in a port that is not its home port, they man the rail, which means you get, in this case our troops were in white, and standing behind each of the stanchions on the man lines along—on the deck, and we came to attention. And we had a bugler on board. Don't ask me why, but we had a bugler, and they passed the word, "Stand by to render honors to the *Arizona*. So, we slid through the still waters of Pearl Harbor, and all the guys on the starboard side come to hand salute, and we slid just so quietly past the *Arizona* memorial. And at that point, you know, we all knew what was there. There were hundreds if not thousands of our fellow Navy guys entombed in there. And the *Arizona* memorial at that time was relatively new. As a matter of fact, in the late '50s, Elvis Presley was instrumental in putting together that memorial. But that was one thing I remember.

The other place… So, we're kind of going back through World War II history. Our next stop is Midway. And after that, we were supposed to go to Yokosuka, Japan. Well, by the time we had gotten that far, with all the fuss going on in Southeast Asia, they said, "No, no, you're going to the Philippines." So we then went to Guam, and then went through the San Bernardino Strait, which is south of Luzon and north of Leyte in the Philippine Islands. San Bernardino Strait was where in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, actually they now call it the Battle off Samar, Admiral Kurita of the Japanese Navy took his battle force into, or through San Bernardino Strait to try to knock out MacArthur's landing force at Leyte. So, we go to Pearl, Midway, Guam, through San Bernardino Strait. So, we're kind of working our way through World War II history just to get to where we're supposed to be, which was Subic Bay. So, it was pretty intriguing. We were serving with guys on board ship who had actually fought in the Second World War. Some of the old chiefs, and some of the senior officers had been in a part of that mix.

HUNTER: Wow, did they have a lot to say about this?

COOPER: They didn't say much. I mean, they made sure we knew where we were going and what had happened. But, you know, didn't wallow in it, because we had our hands full just doing what we were supposed to do day by day, you know.

HUNTER: And just to back up a little bit, as you just mentioned, you deployed a couple of days after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Did you hear about that as it happened or how was that taken by everyone who knew where you were going in a couple of days?

COOPER: Yeah. I mean, everybody kind of gets a little more anxious and a little more focused on what we were supposed to be doing. The first incident was August 2, and I think the second the 4th, and we deployed on the 5th. Now, dates are different because it's the international date line. So the dates may be a little screwed up. But in any event, it was just a matter of a relatively short period of time. And we sensed that something bigger was going on, like I say, and we thought, we didn't know. *My God, we'd bombed a foreign country. What does that mean? What are the Russians or the Chinese gonna do?* And so, we didn't know what would befall us. And again, like I say, I was more worried about my wife who was still in San Diego and my family back here in Cleveland. You know, *What happens to them if things go up in smoke?*

HUNTER: And did you have any idea that [President Lyndon B.] Johnson was going to use the Tonkin incident as a revamp of the war?

COOPER: No. It wasn't that—I wasn't, at least, that tuned into the political dynamic of what was going on.

HUNTER: And, so it was just something that you were all thinking about on this journey over?

COOPER: Uh-huh, yeah. I mean, we're obviously…

HUNTER: So would you mind… [cross-talk] Sorry, go ahead.

COOPER: No, you go ahead.

HUNTER: No, you go ahead. [Laughter] This happens in a phone interview sometimes. I was going to ask if you could talk me through the first couple of days after you reach your destination, after the Philippines maybe?

COOPER: Well, we went into Subic Bay. I'm just trying to think… You know, after crossing the Pacific, there were a lot of things

that needed attention, like repair and just maintenance and upkeep kinds of things, so we were doing that. We also went ashore. We had some liberty. And this is my first time and I went out with a bunch of the guys from the wardroom, which are junior officers. And off we went into Alongapo, which is the town that's around Subic Bay Naval Station. And that was, you know, you didn't want to be drinking anything with ice in it or water, so you drank beer. And so we did that, and somehow I got separated from these guys, and I would go into a bar, order a beer, and drink a few sips of it, look around, if I didn't see them, I left and went to the next bar. And, you know, I'm still looking for my buds, but I had enough sense of direction to know my way back to the gate into the naval station.

Well, I come into the naval station. And we were in civilian clothes. Officers would change into slacks and an opened collar shirt, and go out there, and we had, of course, our military IDs with us, because here we are in the Philippines. Well, I go through the gate, and I'm walking—you know, there's Marine guards there. And again, everybody's on a "who knows what's gonna happen next?" footing, because by this time it's toward the end of August, beginning of September. I forget exactly when by the time we got there. But, so the Marines at the gate are a little nervous. And I'm walking along, you know, I've had my share of beers, and I hear these footsteps running behind me. And I turn around and here's this peachy faced Marine with his rifle up, ready to lay the stock across my chin. So I put my hands up, I said, "What's going on?" He said, "You brought beer onto the base." I had one of these bottles with a half drunk beer in my pocket. [laughter] So, he brings me back to the guard house, and there's a Marine captain who is very impatient. He says, "Write him up." So, they write me up for bringing alcohol onto the base, confiscate my beer, and I'm left to find my way back to my ship, which obviously I did. So, that little story, that was kind of my introduction to "West Pac liberty," as we called it. And I'll bring you a follow-up story after we get into the discussion of our Tonkin Gulf incident.

HUNTER: Okay. Well, then let's do that. So, after you leave the Philippines, early September, what is the general happenings? Well, first, would you mind actually telling me a little bit about what you're doing on the ship at this point? What's your position and daily routine?

COOPER: Yeah, I was still… Well, the daily routine, we're standing watches in port. I'm the ship's secretary and the assistant navigator, so I'm helping the XO [executive officer] do stuff. We had a few, if I remember correctly, we had some training exercises outside of Subic Bay. There were little operating areas just west of Luzon, and we'd go out and we'd do gunnery exercises, or I forget what all else, and then come back in, usually at night, so we're out just for part of the day. And other than that, I'm trying to remember. It was just kind of normal routine in port and near in steaming routine exercises. And we weren't quite sure what we were going to be doing. Then we got the orders that we were going back up into the Tonkin Gulf, the *Morton* and the USS *Edwards*.

HUNTER: How did you feel about that?

COOPER: A little bit about the *Edwards*… It's a sister ship of ours. It's DD-950. We're 948. So, they look almost identical. They're the same armament, three 5-inch main battery and two twin 3-inch secondary battery, and then the anti-submarine weapons, Hedgehogs and torpedoes and depth charges. So, we weren't quite sure what we were going to be doing. Oh, I know what happened. They also loaded onto our ship what they called a beach jumper unit, and I'm not quite sure the meaning of that phrase, but what it was was a big haze gray, same color as the ship, metal box that was about 8 feet by 12 feet by 16 feet. It had no windows and it was welded onto our O-2 level, which was a big area that could accommodate that. And basically what it was was an electronic intelligence gathering system. I'm not sure whether it was proactive; in other words, I don't know whether it was like radar that would emanate a signal that would yield a return or whether it was just a listening device. I'm not sure what that was about. But none of us were cleared to go in there. And we had—I'm trying to think—I know we had one officer and maybe a couple of enlisted men that were assigned to this beach jumper unit. So that was going to be implemented in our trip back up into the Gulf in some fashion. I think we were the only ship that had that. I don't think the *Edwards* had one. But we found out later that what it was doing was tracking the fire control radars that the North Vietnamese had for their missiles and other weapons up off the Gulf in North Vietnam.

HUNTER: Okay, so you then travel into the Gulf. This is early September, if I'm correct. What are the next steps after that?

COOPER: Okay, it was the 15th or the 16th of September, and it was a defined mission. We were to spend three days there. And the way it was to work, we were to go not closer than 20 miles to the coast of Vietnam, and again in my job being assistant navigator, I was responsible for keeping very precise tracks of where we were. There were quartermasters there that were helping me with that, and there was a chief petty officer, chief quartermaster, who was also overseeing his troops. But, the purpose for that was to be able to help that beach jumper unit locate the radars or whatever other electronic stuff it was gathering information about. And so we'd go along the coast during daylight hours. Then in the night we'd withdraw out to the center of the Gulf to get away from the land.

And at the same time, we were linked up by radio with what they called the high com net, which is short for high command. And we had CINCPAC, which is Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, COMNAV for Japan, Commander of Naval Forces, Japan, which was US Navy. Who else? I forget who all else. But, this was a crazy radio and at the time it was not like today where you've got satellites and all that stuff that can give you pretty decent… and it sounded like anybody who was talking over there—there was a voice radio and it sounded like whoever was talking over it was holding their nose. So it was really weird. And they kept—when we finally got into the hubbub on the night of the 18th, I mean, that radio was cracking. I mean, they kept saying, "What's your status? What's happening?" Bah de bah de bah. And then, at one time, one of the messages that I heard at that time—I'll get into the details of this. I was in the pilot house keeping track of where we were going—I heard him say, "We need your status report immediately. The White House wants to know." So, it went all the way up.

And, of course, there had been no US combatants above the 17th parallel until we went up there after the Tonkin Gulf and the bombing of North Vietnam for the first time. So, it was a big deal. And the rest of—not the rest—but there was at least one carrier south of the 17th parallel with other ships, and of course, the airplanes on board, that if we got into trouble we could call for air support. So, we were up there, I think—the first day was the 17th that we were actually on station off North Vietnam. The 18th, same thing, up and down

the coast, tracking. We found out later that the beach jumper unit was tracking these radars. And then we retire.

Well, we start retiring, and at this point I'm standing the watch, the 1800 to 2000 watch, which is, what was that, 6:00-8:00 pm? And I'm trying to get relieved to go down to watch the movie in the wardroom, because there are, usually on every Navy ship underway, and even in port, three movies every night: one in the officers' area, one in chief's quarters and one on the mess decks. And I was interested in the movie they were going to show, and I was trying to get relieved.

But, during the course of my watch, we started picking up these high speed surface craft by radar, and as junior officer of the deck, part of my job was to try to keep these in focus so that we knew where our contacts were. And I remember they were, I don't know, maybe 10,000 yards away, which is like five miles, five nautical miles, and we could see them on the radar repeaters. I mean, these were distinct radar targets. But it was a hazy night, and you just could not see anything around the horizon. You couldn't see the horizon as a sharp edge, you know, just kind of this murky area. And I went out to look out on the port side, the left-hand side of the ship. That would have been looking north, because we were headed out toward the middle of the Gulf, and so we were on an easterly heading. And I said, "Homestead, can you see anything out there?" And he looked and looked and looked, and he said, "Mr. Cooper, I can't see anything. I don't see anything." So we had no visual, and we never did that whole night.

But meanwhile, we're getting these contacts closing us, and they're doing 25, 30 knots. Now, so that's not a fishing boat. And because of its characteristics, size, speed and so forth, you know, we were guessing it was a torpedo boat. So, the commander of this little two-ship task unit was a fellow by the name of Edward Hollyfield. He was a full bird captain, and again, one of those guys who had been on active duty in the end of the Second World War and then Korea. So, he was, you know, a little standoffish, but a really solid guy, a good man. Well, by this time he and the captain are both up on the port wing of the bridge with me and Homestead looking for contacts. And these contacts keep getting closer, and finally Hollyfield says in a very soft voice, he said, "Set condition 1," which means go to battle stations. And so, I

wait for the chain of command. I wait for my captain to say something, and he says nothing; wait for maybe 5, 10 seconds, then he said, my skipper says, “Come on! Come on! Come on!” [laughter] Like I should have taken the command directly from the commodore, but I didn’t do it.

So then, by that time, I looked at the boats mate [Boatswain's mate] on watch, who is the one who would actually give the order over the 1MC, which is the loudspeaker throughout the ship. And his name was Bird. He was the 3rd class boats mate, heavy set guy, wraps his big paw around this 1MC, pushed the speaker down and said, “This is not a drill. This is not a drill. Battle stations.” So off we go. But, what was interesting, I think, and a very common phenomenon, virtually the whole ship knew what was going on, not just the guys up on the bridge and in combat; so that people had begun to drift toward their battle stations.

And the guy that was supposed to relieve me, his name was Norb Bybee [spelling unconfirmed], he was lieutenant JG [Junior Grade] and his billet on board was damage control assistant, which he’s responsible for repair parties and at battle stations he’s responsible for damage control and such things as that. And after he’s sitting there trying to understand from me, which, and I confess, I did not have a good understanding of the contact picture, you know, which was Skunk Alpha, which was Skunk Bravo, and so on and so forth, he said, “You don’t have the picture.” He said, “I think I know where this is going. I’m going down to damage control,” which was his battle station.

And fortunately, the CIC [Combat Information Center] watch officer was a fellow who became and was then a good friend, but has become a lifelong friend—he and his wife, my wife and I raised our kids together, played bridge, blah blah blah—but he was the watch officer in combat. His name is John Heideman [spelling unconfirmed]. And his GQ [general quarters] station was junior officer of the deck, so he was in a position to know better than I what the contact situation is and the picture from combat. So he came out and he didn’t even ask me for the details. He said, “I understand the picture. I relieve you.”

So, my job shifted then to flag navigator, which was on the chart table in the pilot house. So I’m in there trying to run our DR, which is our dead reckoning track of where we’re going,

based on course and speed, and we're steaming along, and we've gone up to flank speed, and the *Edwards* is 500 yards either astern or off our port quarter. And all of a sudden then, the commodore says, "Fire a warning shot on the lead contact." And by this time, of course, the guns are manned, the fire control radars are up, they're locking on the targets, which means they've got a radar contact and the fire control radar is tracking the contact automatically, and it's generating gun orders, and that's an important factor here because there was a great debate, and there still is, as to what if anything we actually shot at up there.

But in any event, we've got the—they've released the main battery, they fire a warning shot. And a warning shot is, you put a deflection in, depending on which way the target is going, so that you're firing in effect across the bow. So we did that. No change. Contact kept coming. And so, commodore says, "Fire for effect." So, at this point, both mounts 51 and 31, which are both right ahead of the bridge, so you've got a 5-inch and two 3-inch barrels all going off at once at this target, and it's about 4,500, 4,000 yards away. The torpedo release range optimum for those boats would have been 4,000 yards. So, they were in a position where they could have fired at us.

But when that happened, these guns go off, and it's a noise I can't begin to describe to you with just one of them going off, but here we have three barrels, two 3-inch and a 5-inch, and the concussion took—by this time it's dark, and we had had a darkened ship, which puts red screening over the lights. There's a fluorescent light above my chart table. And, of course, that red screen drops off with the concussion of the guns going off, and there's this blinding light pouring into the pilot house, which I scrambled to cover up right away. And the target disappears on radar. Again, nobody's seeing anything at this point. And then, at some point, and this happened several times, both the *Edwards* and the *Morton* were shooting at these targets, and I could see over the port bridge wing the fall of shot, couldn't see any boat, but boy, I'll tell you what, there was some ordnance put on whatever those targets were. And the targets then would disappear from the radar scope. So we figure, okay, we've blown these things up.

And then about that time, sonar, which is also manned at general quarters, reports torpedo in the water. So we think

we've got a torpedo and it's coming at us and they'd give us the bearing where they think it's coming from, and they come right hard, right full rudder, which is 30˚ rudder over, and the staff is still on board, Hollyfield and his staff. And this again was not protocol, but this staff officer who isn't in the chain of command as far as giving orders to the helmsman, he said, "Put it over right hard," which is 35˚. So, at flank speed you put the rudder over like that, the ship heels over to port, we snap around. No torpedo hit. But, unfortunately, again, contrary to what is required, the guys in sonar did not have their tape recorder on, so they could not go back and verify what they thought was a torpedo that they heard in the water.

So, meanwhile, we're screaming for air cover, and these guys are, frankly in our view, kind of late in getting on top. In other words, they flew up from their carrier, but it took them quite a while, and by this time we've been steaming around for 45 minutes or an hour. And by this time the targets are, first of all, again, not in sight, but they seem to be drawing back. So, we declare game over, and head south to get back down below the 17th parallel, not real fast, because we're looking for debris. We actually went around and looked to see if we could find any evidence of this, because part of it, there were questions raised about the second Tonkin Gulf incident. No question about what happened with the *Maddox* on the first one on August 2. But there was a serious question when the *Turner Joy* went up. *Turner Joy* is DD-951. That's the same class as mine, so it had the same armament, three 5-inch rapid fire and the twin 3-inch 50s. And it went up and it shot with the *Maddox*, but there was no hard evidence that there were actually torpedo boats up there.

So, part of our job was to come back with hard evidence that we'd been attacked. And one of the things we did on the way up was to, in preparation for towing one of these things back, we had what they called a towing hawser, which is a big line that has, in this case it was interwoven with a steel cable, and it was a big sucker, and it was what they call "face down," which was laid out on a fan tail, the after part of the main deck, so that if we did get a hold of anything that we could tow back, we had the towing hawser ready to go. We never did use it because we didn't find anything that we could tow.

So then we disappear south and get below the 17th parallel and head back for Subic Bay eventually. And we were sworn to secrecy. "You must not tell anybody what happened up there." And sometime later, one of the guys, fortunately on the *Edwards*, not my ship, wrote a letter home describing what had happened. And if I remember, he was a fireman, means he was down in either the fire room or the engine room, and nowhere near top side, so he couldn't have seen anything anyway. But, you know, he's probably dealing with and reporting the scuttlebutt from the mess decks as to what the people on the ship were talking about. But he reported it and, of course, nothing had been—there'd been no press release, there'd been no announcement in the papers, and this is maybe six, eight weeks afterwards that this story comes out somewhere in the Midwest. And I think that was one of the main things at the beginning of Johnson's credibility gap, that he had kept this big secret from the American people about yet another Tonkin Gulf incident. And I have sympathy for all those guys in the White House, because we didn't know for sure what had happened up there.

HUNTER: Do you have suspicions of what you think happened?

COOPER: Yeah. I really haven't reached a conclusion. I'm not sure that they were PT boats, but I know this: there was something out there that was able to generate not only returns on the surface search radar, but it was able to permit the fire control radars and computers to generate gun orders. And you don't do that, as apparently they did a review and they said they were flocks of geese. This happened maybe two years after that. And it was all done in Washington, and they said, "Well, there were a bunch of geese and that's what they shot at." And I said, "Well, no, no, no. We didn't see one goose on the three days we were up there, and no way are a flock of geese going to generate gun orders with the radar returns that they would have offered."

So, there was something there for sure. No idea what it was. It didn't precipitate anything, not like *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on August 4 or whatever that was. In other words, no new Tonkin Gulf resolution. We didn't start bombing mainland China. You know, none of that happened, and largely because I think the politicians and the military were trying desperately to figure out what had happened. And we spent a lot of time afterwards trying to recreate what we did. First

of all, what was our track? Where did we go and cross the water? When did we shoot? What was the angle that we shot at? Where were the targets? All of that other stuff. An inordinate amount of time doing that. And trying to pick up the transmissions from the various radios and the computer logs and all that other stuff. So, it was a very complicated effort, and still very inconclusive. We didn't—I don't recall ever coming up and saying, "Yep, absolutely, this is what happened."

It's funny. A lot of the guys who were involved in that incident got together for a reunion about 20 years afterwards, and not because of that incident, but they just happened to be on board at the same time. But we had in there the weapons officer, the main battery officer, who was also the officer and Director 1, we had the Director 2 officer, Lee Mills; Bob Reuter [spelling unconfirmed] was in director 1; John Foster was the weapons officer; we had the CIC watch officer who was Jim Kameder [spelling unconfirmed]; let's see, who… I was there. John Heideman was there. And, of course, spouses. And we're all kind of getting around and hee-hawing and doing this, that and the other thing, and the wives went off. We're up in Chicago for this little reunion. And we're up in Chicago, and the wives all say, "Let's go shopping." So off they go, and we're sitting there drinking beer in the afternoon in a motel room, and just yucking it up and hee-hawing. We hadn't seen one another for years, you know, so it was a nice reunion. All of a sudden it got quiet, and somebody over in the corner said, "What the hell did we shoot at up there anyway?" So, you know, and we didn't spend a lot of time wallowing in that, but by the same token, none of us has a sense of closure as to what really happened and what it meant. So I refer to it as the third of two Tonkin Gulf incidents.

Now, back to my follow-up story. We end up coming back. We come back to Subic Bay. And the attitude is different. *We went to battle stations for real, guys. We shot our guns at what we thought were hostile targets*. That's a whole different attitude that you would all of a sudden cloak yourself in.

HUNTER: Of course.

COOPER: So, I'm running around doing whatever it is we do in port, you know, filing our—doing reports or standing watch or

whatever, and I get a call, “The XO wants to see you in his stateroom.” So I go back to see the Executive Officer. Great guy. Fred Stalter [spelling unconfirmed]. And he comes in, he said, “I’ve got this report from the commander of the Subic Bay Naval Station.” I thought, *Oh, God*. And he says, “for bringing beer onto the naval station. And so he reads me this citation. And I looked at him and I said, “XO,” I said, “that beer’s probably too warm and flat by now to be any good to anybody.” Which, for a junior officer to make a smart ass comment like that to a lieutenant commander who’s a career Navy guy, I think it came from the fact that we’d all been up there together in this shooting thing, you know? And bless his heart, he remembers this story exactly as I do, and he just kind of smiled, [laughter] wrinkled up the report and threw it out.

So, it changed a lot of the way we just thought of ourselves, I think, at that point, because while it hadn’t been a knock-down, drag-out fight for sure, but it had been a serious piece of combat, at least from our side. So, yeah, that made a difference. You know, we’d got all this training we could do. We can still shoot these guns, we can still navigate, we can go to battle stations and tuck our pant legs into our socks to cut down the flash risk, you know, that kind of stuff. So, it was pretty reassuring, I thought.

HUNTER: Interesting. It was reassuring. Did you think that the rest of your time in the Gulf of Tonkin was going to be similar things? Did it change how you expected the time to go?

COOPER: Didn’t know what to expect at that time. And things were different. I mean, we spent a lot of time after that training for what we had already done. In other words, we’d be up working with airplanes that were dropping flares on high speed surface contacts that were working with us. So we did that. We also did some of the other things, like plane guarding. I mean, a destroyer’s job in that sense is to work with the carrier, and depending on how many are there, you would screen the carrier against submarines and air attack. But, plane guarding meant you steamed along 500 yards astern of the carrier in case there were a crash or an accident and a pilot had to eject, or is anyway in the water, and so we had a search and rescue team on the fokes hull [spelling unconfirmed] ready to go in the water and pick up a pilot if he happened to crash and had to eject or something.

So we did a good bit of that. Again, gunfire training and so on and so forth.

HUNTER: Did you have any more contacts other than that during that first tour?

COOPER: Not during the first tour. Second tour we did a lot of shooting. In fact, we shot in all four Corps areas in support of troops. But, no sea to sea combat. In other words, we had no sea fights at all with PT boats or any other craft.

HUNTER: Was it strange to have to keep that event secret?

COOPER: Yeah, it was, I mean, because I was writing every day, every other day back home, just to keep in touch with my wife. And when the story broke, I wrote to my father to explain to him, and I said I wasn't quite sure how Karen would take this, you know, if she finds I'm over here in an actual shoot-up. I didn't want to upset her. And so, he writes back and he said, you know, "Don't worry about upsetting her. She's stronger than you think. And besides, she thinks that everything she reads about is happening to you over there." [laughter] Which probably was true.

HUNTER: And what did the crew on board think of what was happening on mainland Vietnam? Was there a lot of information about that or was it sort of you guys focusing on your own tasks?

COOPER: Primarily focusing on our own tasks. There wasn't much news to be reported at the time. Again, I remember a member of Commodore Hollyfield's staff was on the bridge when we were coming up to Da Nang. I think it was before the—in our first trip over there, and I'm looking up, and I see flashes of what I understood later to be gunfire. And I looked—and this guy had been in country beforehand in a prior assignment, and then been put on the staff, and was no longer on the ground in Vietnam. And he looks at me like "you idiot, that's a firefight. There's guys shooting at each other up there." And this was up on the hill just south of Da Nang. So we knew that there was fighting going on, but weren't really attuned, at least I wasn't, to the daily activities that were happening in Vietnam, and how many troops were being sent or withdrawn or added or any of that.

HUNTER: You had no measure on how sort of, quote-unquote, "well" the war was going?

COOPER: No. Huh-uh. No. And that was true through the ’66 cruise, as well. We would get reports, when we were doing gunfire support, particularly in the 3rd Corps area around Vung Tau. We had some of the ground force officers come aboard and tell us where we were, and they would show us this map, and there would be, “This area we control 24 hours a day. This area we don’t control any hour of the day. This area we control during daylight hours. This area just at nighttime.” [laughter] It was just crazy. And it was very much a patchwork at that time as to what he was showing us. So, it was… and he was admitting that it was touch and go, and pretty much static.

HUNTER: Right. So, after this incident, the rest of the ’64 tour. When did you find out that you were having a break between the two?

COOPER: Well, I can’t remember. I know we ended up in Yokosuka. We did get to Hong Kong. Oh, and this is another piece of good fortune for the ship. At that time, the Red Guards were rampant in China, and Mao [Tse Tung] was, you know, waiving a heavy fist. And so, if you went to Hong Kong, you had to needle your way through what they called the Liamung Pass [spelling unconfirmed], which was an area between two chunks, I believe, of Communist China. And at that time the British crown colony of Hong Kong was deeper into the harbor. Well, you had to go across the dividing point, the closest point between the two Communist pieces of land at exactly the time that you reported. So we had to navigate to go in there, and hit it at 0900 right on the money. And so, I was again still navigating at that point. And so, we’re computing and adjusting courses and speeds like crazy going in there.

So we go in. And typically there is no permanent naval presence, US Navy presence in Hong Kong. And so, they would assign one ship as, at one time it was called station ship, and then it became Senior Officer Present Afloat, so the captain of the ship was in effect SOPA Admin, as they said, for the Hong Kong area. And what that meant was they would arrange for moorings of ships coming in for a two or three day liberty, they’d arrange for garbage pickup, delivery of mail and food supplies and other materials. So, it was you’re basically the innkeeper for that. Well, we got tapped as SOPA Admin, which meant we spent 16 days, and two or

three in Hong Kong. So we ran out of money pretty fast. [laughter] As the liberty port, it was head and shoulders above anything else in the Western Pacific. Hong Kong was fabulous.

HUNTER: What did you spend your money on?

COOPER: Well, there were a lot of free duty stores, so people bought souvenirs. I'm sitting here looking at a couple things that I bought over there. There's a big brass coffee table that I got and some little tables that I brought back and we jammed into the ship. I mean, that was a tricky part, putting those into the ship, stowed in a way that they didn't impact the operational readiness of the ship itself, and also was secure enough that when the ship bounced around as it often did, the stuff that you bought didn't get all banged up. But we somehow did it. And a lot of guys did it. I forget who—one of the skippers on one of the ships bought a piano, and somehow got that piano loaded on, not our ship, but another ship, and it made it back, so…

But, that was a pretty heady time. And we had—another funny story. Talk about intelligence? We're station ship. We're going to be there for a while, so we were going to have a ship's party in Hong Kong. Well, you can't have one party. You have to have two, because we were standing what they called port and starboard watches. Half the crew's on one day 24 hours. The other half is on the next day 24 hours, both for security and maintenance, upkeep, cleanliness, monitoring radio traffic, all of that stuff. So, one night we were going to have the party, then the next night we'd have the other party. And we had it, I think it was called the New World of Susie Wong bar. Now, I don't know whether you know the movie, *The World of Susie Wong*?

HUNTER: Not sure I do.

COOPER: Yeah, William Holden was in it. I mean, it was back in the '50s or '60s. Anyway, it was about a bar girl in Hong Kong, so they named a bar after her and they called it the New World of Susie Wong bar. Well, we go in there the first night. I happen to be off duty that night, so I was at the first night of the ship's party. So I go walking in there and there's this great hubbub down at the bar. And I went up there and I said, "What's going on?" And they said, "They said we can't have the party tomorrow night." I said, "Why not?" They said,

"Because the *Constellation*'s coming in" or "the *Ranger*." One of the big carriers was coming into Hong Kong. And so we get all puffed up and said, "Look, we're station ship. We're the ones that arrange their mooring sites if they come in. We just left the ship and we have no indication that that carrier's coming in here." We get back to the ship, and sure enough, the carrier's coming in here. And the guy in the bar in Wan Chai, which is at the time the fleet bar district, knew before we did at station ship.

HUNTER: Wow.

COOPER: Now, go figure that out. You talk about intelligence? Those people—and it was their business to know who's coming in, but he didn't want to lock up the bar for just our ship when he was going to have a whole carrier load of sailors coming in with about 3,000 thirsty and horny guys to come out and run around in his bar.

HUNTER: Do you have any ideas of how he knew?

COOPER: No idea. Didn't ask him. I thought he was, you know, and all of us thought he was just smoking dope or something. And then we come back and find that yep, the carrier's coming in.

HUNTER: Wow. Okay, so after you're stationed, what were the next steps that happen after that?

COOPER: Well, at that time things kind of were winding down for that '64 cruise. We went up to Yokosuka. I was at Yokosuka over Christmas, I know, and there wasn't much going on. I went up and rode the train up to Tokyo, and then rode the train down to Kamakura, and did a little touristy stuff. I remember going over, I think it was the range and they were taking blood, and donated a pint of blood because they were needing the blood in Vietnam at the time, so a lot of us did that. But I don't have much of a recollection there was a whole lot of activity in that '64 cruise.

I do remember one time, boy, we lost a sailor over the side, coming back from the Vietnam area to Subic Bay. And apparently what had happened, he had been on watch in the fire room, which is hot in any case, but first of all, we're in the tropics basically in the South China Sea in late summer. And he came up out of the fire room, probably dehydrated, disoriented, and apparently walking back to his berthing

space he was top side, and it was dark in the middle of the night and the ship's underway and rolling around, he went over the side. And they think he got sick and then either passed out or fell over. And so we turned around and tried to go back and look for him, and we ended up with about three ships and spent about three days, steaming back and forth up there looking for this guy and never did find him, which is a tragedy, you know. But, those are the kinds of things you remember.

The other thing I remember, when we were doing these drills with the high speed surface craft and managing aircraft over them to drop flares and try to help visualize and identify them, one of the flares got caught up in the ejection shoot out of the plane, and went off in the plane. And the plane caught fire and went down, and they lost everybody on board. There were about 11 guys. And, of course, we were controlling that aircraft as a part of the exercise, and it was at night. So, we put a boat in the water and were out looking for people, and only found a couple bodies. It was pretty grisly. And the others we assume went down.

HUNTER: Yeah, that's terrible.

COOPER: Yeah. So, there were risks, what they call operational risks, you know, in addition to combat risks, of injury or death.

HUNTER: Did you go home at all between the two tours?

COOPER: No, not beyond San Diego. I came back, I forget exactly when on the calendar I got back. I know it was after Christmas of '64, probably sometime in February, yeah, February or March. We had some basic down time, first of all, for a couple of weeks, and then went back to operational training, and then during the summer we had yard availability, which meant we went up to the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, went into drydock and did a lot of heavy duty maintenance and some off ship training during that period. We were in Long Beach for about three months, which means we'd be up there and then take buses back on Friday afternoon to San Diego.

In my case, I had an apartment. My wife was living there and working. So we'd come back on the weekends, unless we had the duty, and then, of course, then we'd stay there. And there was one month of the three that my wife moved up

there to stay in Long Beach, and we just happened to be there during the Watts riots. So, we were going to go out with another couple, he was the disbursing officer and his wife. We were going to go out for dinner. Well, we get the word that the riots are going on and the police are called out and there's the National Guard and all of this running around. Well, one of the reports was right near the place where there was another one of our friends, an officer on the ship, and his wife were staying. And we thought, "Okay, ladies, you stay here, and Herb and I," Herb Fish and I, get in the car, go over there to Art Drinan's house to see how his wife, Jean, is doing. And nobody's home and there's absolutely no activity. But we thought we'd better go over and protect Jean Drinan from whatever was going on. So, the Watts riots were another thing that just at least peripherally we got involved in during that time. That would have been what, '65, I think.

HUNTER: Yeah. When you came back, was it a shock to experience the sentiments of the rest of the population?

COOPER: Well, no, at that time, '65, the anti-war sentiment was just in its infancy, and besides, I think it's important to understand San Diego. San Diego was basically a military camp. First of all, there were historically a lot of defense industries there, and a huge military presence. You had the Marine Corps recruit depot, let's see, you had North Island Naval Air Station, the headquarters for the amphibious forces for the Pacific fleet was also on Coronado and North Island, the 11th Naval District's headquarters were in San Diego, and of course, my base, the 32nd Street Naval Station, was there. There was also a submarine base. Camp Pendleton was another Marine facility, and an Air Force base. So, it was very heavily military in physical fact, as well as in sympathy in San Diego. So there was very little anti-war sentiment that I encountered, at least.

HUNTER: And did you know—you had the dates for when you were going to be going back out?

COOPER: I don't remember when we learned about that, and I don't even remember when those dates were, but I know it was in '66. So, we had…

HUNTER: Was there…Ooh, sorry, go ahead.

COOPER: I'm just trying to think out loud with you a little bit here. It probably would have been early '66 that we went, because I was due to get out in March of '67, and I extended through the end of June '67. And in May of '67, we deployed again for the Western Pacific. I rode the ship over and then almost promptly flew right back to go off active duty. So, it was probably, I'm guessing we would have left somewhere in the early months of '66 for that next cruise.

HUNTER: Was there a particular reason that you decided to extend?

COOPER: Yeah. Karen was pregnant, and we were hoping that the Navy would be—I didn't want to move her while she was pregnant, for one thing. But the other thing was that the Navy would cover the cost of her delivery. And by that time I had already applied to and been accepted by the University of Wisconsin Law School, so I knew that in September I was going to be starting law school in Madison, Wisconsin. So I had that period which would have been from March to September without anything to do, and so I could stay employed for a longer period, I could cover my wife's health and the cost of the delivery of our first child by giving the Navy another four months of my time, which I did.

HUNTER: When did you decide to go to law school?

COOPER: First of all, I was recruited to stay in the Navy longer. And I actually looked into that and was trying to figure out something, and they had offered me post-graduate school in Monterrey, California, and a couple of other things that were pretty attractive things for me to do. But, you know, I came again to visit. One of the things I was looking to do was stay in San Diego. I liked it there. Karen had made friends there. But there wasn't a decent billet for me. There was an air traffic controllers school. I wasn't an air traffic controller, so I would have had to do some basic learning, and that was one thing I was interested in. And so I'm on the telephone talking to the detailer, who's the guy at the Bureau of Personnel in Washington, who's looking at my file. And he said, "Okay, we can do this, we can do that." And he said, "Look, if you really want this, I'm gonna give it to you, but that's a dead end billet. It's not a good career move for you. You'd kind of be wasting your time." I said, "Thank you very much. Let me think about it. I'll call you back." And I did and I turned it down and that's when I decided to get out.

Going to law school, again, Vin Di Figlia was also on the destroyer homeported in San Diego. He and I were on different deployment schedules, so we didn't see much of each other, but we got talking and had been together from time to time. And both of us thought going to law school a pretty decent career choice to think about, because it gave us some flexibility. Not only that. Jim Kameder, one of the officers I'd mentioned, had left the Navy and had gone to a couple of years before I left to go to law school at Wisconsin. And so I contacted him. I said, "Tell me what you think of the law schools in the Midwest." I kind of wanted to go back somewhere near my home, Cleveland, Ohio. It was where my family was, my wife's family, and so forth. So I applied to Michigan, Yale, although it's not close to home, and Wisconsin. I got into Wisconsin, and off I went.

HUNTER: Okay. So, you already have that in your mind when you're setting off on the '66 cruise.

COOPER: No, that decision was made after the '66 cruise.

HUNTER: Okay, sorry, my mistake.

COOPER: I had come back in early '67, and that's about when I started doing these other career planning moves.

HUNTER: Were there any major differences that you felt between the '66 cruise and the earlier ones?

COOPER: First of all, for me personally, I felt much more at home doing what I was doing. I also had I considered to be a more meaningful position on the ship, as assistant weaps and fire control and main battery officer and battle station GLO, gunnery liaison officer. So, coincidentally we also drew station ship on the '66 cruise. So, I had two heavy doses of Hong Kong while I was on active duty. [laughter] But, we also got into Kaohsiung and Taipei in Taiwan in the '66 cruise. And I don't think we hit those ports at all, and those are pretty interesting places to be, too, be in Taiwan, because there were, at that time we called it the Formosa Patrol, but what they did were run usually destroyers in the area of the sea between Taiwan and mainland China, and it appeared, and the cover story was we were keeping the Chinese from coming across the attacking the Taiwanese, where the nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek and his folks had gone. But really it was to keep the nationalist Chinese from

doing something rash and trying to throw themselves on mainland China and take back the country from the Communists. So, we had a couple of tours of that duty.

HUNTER: What were your main responsibilities during that time?

COOPER: I'm sorry?

HUNTER: What were your main responsibilities during that time, sort of a normal day for you?

COOPER: Well, again, when we were doing gunfire support, we had the guns manned at what they called Condition 3 all the time, which meant that we had one gun crew operating or operational and could return fire or fire, because we were pretty close to the shore. But we were very busy. We spent I think 55 days of that '66 cruise on the gun line as they called it, which means we're going along the coast and waiting for the gunfire spotters on the ground to call for fire. Most of what we did was in the 3rd Corps. There are four Corps areas in Vietnam. Starting up at Hue and Da Nang is one, and then the 3rd Corps area was around the mouth of the Saigon River. Vung Tau was the city—the one time I got ashore there in Vung Tau to meet with the spotters, and we talked to them about our guns and how they were different from the old World War II guns because of their rapid fire, their longer range, and basically heavier firepower, so they could understand that. But, my responsibilities were primarily to maintain, to see that my troops actually maintained the guns, and of course they were on top of that like you couldn't ask for more. And also the fire control equipment, the computers and the radars and so forth.

HUNTER: I'm curious about your… Ooh, sorry.

COOPER: Go ahead.

HUNTER: You mentioned the time ashore. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

COOPER: Yeah, the first time we went there were maybe a handful of us officers. There were myself and I think the captain went ashore, probably not the XO because either the captain or the XO would need to have to stay aboard, the weapons officer was there, another operations—I don't remember exactly who, but there were, say, maybe a half a dozen.

Well, when we found we were going ashore in Vietnam, we said, “Well, we all ought to take a .45 automatic pistol with us.” So we get there and we pull up to the little dock in Vung Tau and look around and said, “This is silly. We don’t need these guns.” So we left the guns in the boat, the ship’s boat. And then we were picked up and taken to a place where we could meet with a couple of guys from the Army and Marines who would call for our fire and spot our rounds when they were coming down. We talked with them for a while, and then just went back to the ship.

The second time we did that was in Da Nang, and we had maybe eight or ten of us go, including the squadron chaplain, because we had some of the squadron staff officers on board. And this guy was interesting. His name was Bruce Schumacher. Bruce was a former Marine fighter pilot, and he came aboard as a Protestant chaplain, as part of the division staff. Well, see, he went ashore with us, and there were several others. Well, on the way back, all of us kind of got into the little cabins, and we’d had a couple of beers, and not too seriously. But, the guy who felt he knew better than anybody else said, “Well, there’s our ship. Let’s go straight for it.” Well, you had to follow the river channel out in the Da Nang harbor. As it turns out, we ran the gig aground. So here we are, the gig’s aground in the dark, you know, there are firefights up in the hills. This is kind of stupid. So, we all strip down to our skivvies and jump in the water and pull the gig off the sandbar, and climb aboard dripping wet. So it was not our finest hour. And then we had to get underway and take the ship out and replenish at night, because the oiler was coming by and it was our turn to go get a drink.

HUNTER: And those were the only few times you went ashore? Did you get a sort of read of what was going on on the mainland during those times? From the firefights, I assume?

COOPER: Well, no. We would get little, very local focused points based on our call fire missions. For example, there was one of our junk bases that came under fire by the Viet Cong, and so we broke that up with our gunfire. So we knew that little episode had transpired, and our guys were safe and the bad guys got shot up. But, other than that, we didn’t have much appreciation for the big picture, let’s say.

HUNTER: So, what would a typical—you said that you were providing gun support. Can you tell me a little bit more about that and what you would be doing during one of those missions?

COOPER: Yeah. Let me just think. A typical day would be, again, Condition 3 watches, I'd be on watch from, say, midnight to 6:00. So, and if we were doing what they called H&I, which is harassment and interdiction fire. In other words, we were, particularly in the Saigon River, there were areas there, if I remember it correctly, it was called the Rung Sat Special Zone, which was an area that was highly infiltrated with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. And so, they just wanted us to be putting rounds into that area generally, without any targets of specific nature. So we would fire two or three rounds here, and then we'd wait 20 minutes and shift to another position on the chart and fire some more rounds in there, to keep their heads down.

So, I remember one time at Reveille, which is 0600, we timed the firing at that particular moment for just at the time we'd call Reveille to wake the troops up, because the guns are going to make enough noise to wake people up anyway. But, it was almost 9:00 to 5:00 as the time period when specific targets were there. We had one occasion… Well, and a specific target would be, I mentioned the junk base. The junk base was taking mortar rounds. Well, the junk base, of course, is right along the water, either on the river, or actually near the shoreline. So, we would get a position, and we had charts that we could plot that position on it, and we used what is called the Point Oscar method. And what that means is, you get your main fire control radar to lock on a specific geographic point. It could be a lighthouse. It could be a rock outcropping that you can find on a chart. And that radar stays locked onto that target, as though—and if you didn't do anything more, it could generate gun orders to shoot at that target.

So what you would do is, they'd give you the position of the target that they wanted you to shoot at, and you'd find out where that was in relation to Point Oscar. And then you'd put in offsets that could be as much as 3 miles by 5 miles. So then, while the radar thinks it's shooting at something else, you've told the computer that no, no, you want to go north 5 miles and west 3 miles, and that's where your target is. Once that's set up, then you would report to the spotter, and this guy could be on the ground, he could be on an airplane,

looking at the target, and we'd tell him "we're ready," and when he was clear enough and had a good enough visual on the target, he'd give us the go ahead to fire. We would then shoot the first round, a spotting round, and he would then tell us "you need to…" And the spots would come in either geographically north-south or along the observer target line, and we would find out what that line was so we could make adjustments for the computer, and we would then hear his spot. It could be, you know, "add 500, left 100" or something. Then we'd put that into the computer. New gun orders would be generated. We'd report "ready." He's say, "fire for effect."

And oftentimes what they would do, based on their experience with World War II cans, they'd ask for two guns, five salvos, which means you get five bullets out of each of two guns, usually twin 5-inch mounts on the old World War II cans. And we finally convinced them, I said, "Look, all you need is one gun 6 out of us, because we can get those rounds there more quickly, because these are all automatically loaded 5-inch mounts. And there's enough horsepower in those projectiles to give you the impact that you want." So, that was, when we'd fire for effect, that's usually the way we'd do it. And then, interestingly enough, we would say, "rounds complete," and he said, "target neutralized" or "target over" or something like that, and move onto another target if there were one. So, oftentimes we didn't know what was happening to—what was the effect of our fire, except in that one—really, there were several instances like this where we were getting, we were actually in the middle of a firefight as a part of it, and we then knew the outcome.

HUNTER: Can you explain a little bit more about one of those times?

COOPER: Well, this was a delayed reaction. We had—one reporter was just off of Vung Tau in the 3rd Corps area, and again, I was on the Condition 3 watch, was about to get off at midnight when this call for fire came in. They had reported that they had intelligence that a North Vietnamese battalion had made its way that far south and was set up in this certain area, and they wanted a whole array of targets. They wanted an area target, and they said, "We want everything you've got for five minutes on this area. Then we want you to move to these peripheral areas and give us 10 rounds apiece. Then there's another area…" And they were anticipating the movement of the troops away from the base

camp that had been set up. And the last target—so there were trails, there were hot points and so forth—and the last one that I remember was, as a part of this, was along the beach where for a stretch of about a half a mile they felt that they had their boats tied up. So, we were to, again, give it all we had in that one.

And I remember we set up the target where you fire at the closest point, then we added 1,000 yards, which is a hell of a big spot to go to the end of that stretch, and then I dropped 8, added 6, dropped 4, added 2, so we go back and forth to walk eventually up and down that entire area. And it was a very low trajectory. The target was pretty close, so we wouldn't have been hitting… The rounds would have been spread out just by virtue of the way the fire was coming down. So, that one we got reports the next day when somebody got into that area and actually was able to see in daylight what had happened, and there was pretty significant impact on that battalion.

HUNTER: Do you remember what date that was?

COOPER: Boy, I don't. I know it was in '66—well, like I say, we had 55 days, not all together. We'd come back to Subic Bay and re-arm and so forth, and then refuel, get liberty, and go to Kaohsiung and Taipei and Hong Kong and other stuff, and then we'd go back on the line. But we fired over 10,400 rounds in total over there, in that 55-day period.

HUNTER: Was there sort of a general mood on the ship at this point where you were doing these rapid, so these 55 days of intense work?

COOPER: I think morale was good. We had had another change of command. Our skipper during the '66 cruise was Robert Bodemur [spelling unconfirmed], and he was a crackerjack skipper. I think of, and I served with four commanding officers, he was the best. He was an extraordinary leader, a good spirited guy, and smart. You know, he knew his business. And he had tremendous enthusiasm and energy. He was just a great guy. Where do I go with that? [laughter] Have I dodged it? Oh, the general mood. You were asking what was the general feeling. I think the attitude was good. We thought we were doing our job and doing it well. The political tensions in '66 were not as ripe as they became, although we knew back in the States that there were a

number of people who were, increasing number who were anti-war. But that was them, you know?

HUNTER: How did that news sort of filter through?

COOPER: Pardon me?

HUNTER: How did that news come across? Through letters?

COOPER: Well, people got angry. But then, you know, it wasn't something we dwelt on a lot. I think it was just sort of a reaction. I had one occasion that I think tells you a little bit about the story. And I'm jumping ahead a bit, because I'm almost out of the Navy at this point. And it's spring of '67. And a fellow that I knew reported aboard the ship. He had just come out of Officer Candidate School, and he had graduated from Williams [College] in '66. So he's three years younger than I am. I knew him or knew of him because his sister had married one of my fraternity brothers at Dartmouth.

So, anyway, he comes aboard, and just about this time we're reading in the paper that Lady Bird Johnson has gone to Williams to make a speech about her highway beautification ideas, in other words, get rid of all the billboards and all that stuff. She goes to Williams, and I don't know whether it was some sort of an assembly or a class or what it was, but anyway the news story was that the Williams students got up and walked out on her. Well, I'm sitting there fuming. I said, "You don't do that. I don't care what you think of Johnson or the First Lady. You just don't do that." This guy looks at me and he said, "That's the difference between your generation and my generation. Now he's talking about three years, okay? Something happened to this country in the mid-'60s. I'm not sure what it was, but it was significant enough that he viewed our three years as a generational divide. But I'll never forget that. I mean, I was dumbfounded when he said that. But I think he's right, you know. Things were very, very different in '67 than they were in '63 and '64 when I got started.

HUNTER: Right. So then, you said that in spring of '67 is when you returned home?

COOPER: I know I was stateside in the spring of '67. We deployed sometime—I was gone for maybe four or five weeks as the

first part of that six month deployment, and then flew back to go off active duty. So, again, exact dates I'm not real sure of. The '66 cruise we did I would say September, maybe early October. But I may be screwed up on that.

HUNTER: Were there any other big events that you remember from the '66 cruise as being impactful on the rest of your time?

COOPER: Yeah. Let me think about that. Not really. Not that I can think of.

HUNTER: How did you feel heading home, going off active duty?

COOPER: Well, I was pretty optimistic and excited. You know, I'm gonna be home, my wife and I are going to be together, we're not going to have these month separations, and I've got a new kid coming. My first child is about to be born. So I'm feeling pretty good. I felt I had done what I could do while I was there, but it was time to go on and do something else. I was a little nervous about going to law school, because I'd been out of an academic environment for effectively four years; well, three years anyway. So I was a little nervous about going back to book learning. I made dean's list first semester, so I felt good about that.

HUNTER: Yeah, congrats. What was the transition back into civilian life like?

COOPER: I think it's colored by the fact that I went straight from San Diego to Madison, Wisconsin. So I didn't go back home, even though we had—we left San Diego with a four-week-old baby in July. And, you know, if my kids did something like that now, I'd call them idiots. But, you know, we made it. And we set up housekeeping there, and then drove down to Cleveland so our son could meet his grandparents. So, getting back into civilian life was a little interesting. At that time, the anti-war sentiment was beginning to be focused on those of us in uniform, and there were some occasions where while I was deployed, Karen would get threatening phone calls while she was still living in San Diego. I mean, there was nothing physical done, but it was just a sense of intimidation.

I remember we got a newspaper that was mailed to us on the ship, and it was from a place called Morton, Texas. And they, because of the name had adopted our ship a little bit,

and they were basically writing and saying, "We don't care what the rest of those people say. We support you and our troops" and so on and so forth.

But, three years in Madison was tough duty. I stayed in the Reserves, and for a while that was pretty simple, because they let us do some academic things. We'd report once a week on an evening, and spend three hours getting some sort of instruction. I honestly can't even remember now what it was. But we were in civilian clothes. There were a bunch of us there because there were a number of post-grads and people in my position who had put in some time in active duty, and wanted to stay active or had to stay active in the Reserves. But by the same token, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin, considered itself the Berkeley of the Midwest. And Berkeley was sort of the hotbed at the time of the anti-war sentiment, at least in the college ranks. So, there was a lot of anxiety about being there. I basically kept my head down, but I knew that most of the people I was in class with were adamantly against the war, and in some senses, angry at those of us who had been involved in it as supporting what they thought was a wrongheaded policy and, you know, all of that stuff that's the Vietnam War.

HUNTER: Did any of this sort of change how you felt about the war?

COOPER: No, I don't think so. I know there were a lot of mistakes made. I think one of the things that still concerns me is that there was a lot of misinformation and spinning that went on. For example, the Tet Offensive, which I was in law school at the time, of course, that was '68, but the Tet Offensive, while a shock and audacious, was a tremendous loss to the Communists. I mean, they lost thousands of people, including some of their top guns, and they burned up a lot of resources. And it embarrassed the United States, and to that extent it achieved its purpose from a public relations standpoint. But, that fact, I think, was not well portrayed. You know, they viewed it as evidence that it was a hopeless cause, whereas it could have been cast as desperate act of the other side in trying to attack on their own religious holiday to try to overcome what was increasingly a stronger position for the South Vietnamese. But we'll never know that, because of the way things…over the years.

HUNTER: Did you follow what was going on in Vietnam, sort of the course of the war as you were going through law school and onwards?

COOPER: No, not that closely. I mean, obviously, in a superficial way, just the evening news and that kind of stuff. But, I started school with a three-month-old, and then our second son was born at the beginning of my second year of law school. So for most of that time, you know, I had the wife and two kids that we were dealing with as well as doing the law school. And I started teaching legal writing in my second year of law school, so I had that going on at the same time, plus staying active in the Reserves. So, I was pretty much… You know, and law school takes a lot of time and effort, for me at least it did. [laughter] Yeah, I wasn't…

And I had made a group of friends there that many of them were very much anti-Johnson, against Johnson, against the war, and so forth, but we kind of put those differences aside, not that we spent a lot of time trying to change one another's minds at all. But, we just tried to get along. But, and those friends were all married. So, I was kind of gathering with people that were similarly situated, not the bachelor guys that were out there doing different stuff. Our social life was in many respects determined by the fact that we were married. We'd have couples' parties and get together and you know that kind of stuff. But, no, I was not actively pursuing a day-to-day understanding of what was going on over there.

HUNTER: Did you feel like your experiences had a big impact on what was going on in the rest of your life after you came back?

COOPER: I'm sure it did. I'm not quite sure I can point to anything specifically. I know it's not the kind of thing—I don't think this puts me in a different category than most veterans, but we just don't talk about it much. I didn't have the trauma that a lot of guys did, you know, the guys on the ground that saw their buddies blown up in front of them. I never had anything like that to deal with. So, to that extent I didn't have that post-traumatic stress symptom. You know, I think about it from time to time. I don't regret doing what I did. I'm not jealous of the time that I committed to it. I thought it was an experience that, you know, I spent over a month in Hong Kong, for Pete's sake, you know? [inaudible] There's nothing wrong with that. I mean, so I did get a very broadening experience as a part of that. Met some very interesting

people, I think learned a lot from my active duty time as far as dealing with people and developing a sense of self-confidence. So, I think it was all to the good. But, I don't think that…I've seen the country change a lot with regard to its attitude toward the military, for example, is much better than it was during the '60s. I was thinking military things, you know.

HUNTER: I was going to ask, yeah, do you see any sort of parallels between then and now or how the Vietnam War sort of changed American society?

COOPER: You know, I just really… It's hard for me to verbalize that. Not that I could really kind of clarify my thinking. If I did that, then I could speak about it. But, I'm really not sure how it did that. I'm sure I may think of that. We probably ought to reschedule another talk and let me think some more about that.

HUNTER: Yeah, I'm definitely happy to do that. Well, maybe I'll put it like this, and then we can think about other things for another time. But, so looking back from where you are now in your life, do you have any general takeaways from your experience, and reflections of what you would say now?

COOPER: I don't know. I think for me it was a worthwhile step, that experience, for me personally, just in dealing with the things I had to deal with. So, for me it was a part of the progression. So I think it built some confidence, not that I necessarily needed that. But, you know, I felt I had a task to accomplish and I did that and I did it pretty well. So... But as far as broader perspectives and understandings, I'm not sure. It tends to be, as I reflect on it, it tends to be more an introspective process than a broader philosophical one, if that makes sense.

HUNTER: Yeah, it definitely does. Well, thank you. I think this might be a good place to sort of hit pause on this conversation. I'm definitely happy to reach out and schedule another session if you feel like you have more to say. Do you have any sort of last remarks for this particular recording session?

COOPER: No, I don't think so. And, maybe a thing to do is, shoot me an email, because I've got a couple other commitments here that I need to tend to tonight. But then I can take a look at that and think whether it would be useful to you to have

another conversation with me. And if you'd want to point out a couple of… Well, let me ask another question. I've got a bunch of materials here. Would it be useful for you to have those? Do you care about that? Or is the interview the primary purpose and vehicle by which you're doing this project?

HUNTER: The interview is definitely the primary focus of this particular project. But I'm happy to, I think outside of this recording we can discuss those materials. But for now I just want to say thank you so much for being in this interview. I'm going to stop recording now.

COOPER: Okay.

HUNTER: Thank you very much.

COOPER: You bet.

[End of Interview.]