

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

National Guard History

Personal Experiences

O. H. 775

HOWARD COOK

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

April 6, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

National Guard Project

INTERVIEWEE: HOWARD COOK

INTERVIEWER: David Arms

SUBJECT: schooling, basic training, commander duties, World War II

DATE: April 6, 1976

A: This is an interview with Mr. Howard Cook for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by David Arms at Fitch High School, Austintown, Ohio, on April 6, 1976, at approximately 12:40 p.m.

Mr. Cook, could you just give me an idea of your personal background, where you were born, brought up, that type of thing?

C: Yes. I was born in Wilmington, Delaware. I attended high school in Wilmington. From there I went to World War II. I enlisted in the United States Coast Guard in 1942, and served until April of 1946. At that time I returned to Wilmington and in the fall of 1946, I entered New York University. I spent the year there. Then in 1947 I transferred out to Youngstown College and I married my wife, Mary.

A: Did you graduate from Youngstown College?

C: I graduated from Youngstown College in 1950 and after that I attended Youngstown Night School of Law. I received my master's degree from Westminster College around 1963 on a part-time basis.

A: What did you major in in college?

C: I majored in education and minored in psychology.

A: You mentioned that you joined the Coast Guard in 1942. Could you give me an idea of why you did this?

C: Well, prior to the war I was a lifeguard for a few years as a young man and I always had the Coast Guard as a goal. I

wanted to enter the service and when the war came along it was the most natural place for me to enlist. When I went up to enlist, they found I had large tonsils and they refused me. I never had any trouble with this in my life, so I went home and within a day I made arrangements to have my tonsils out. Within a week I had a hemorrhage and within a month I went back. This was in Philadelphia. I went to the Coast Guard enlistment room and he said I was too late, the enlistments were closed. So I went across the hall and I was ready to join the Marine Corps when he came over and said since they promised me they would take me.

I went to Manhattan Beach Training Station. During my Coast Guard experience I served at Sandy Hook, New Jersey aboard USS General Philip E. Mitchell and General W. P. Richardson, tube transports. I was discharged from Ellis Island in New York.

- A: What was your job on these ships? What were you trained for?
- C: I got the rating storekeeper first, second . . . In the reserves, I was storekeeper third, second, first class. I was discharged storekeeper first class.
- A: I see. So you were basically a storekeeper your time in the Coast Guard?
- C: Right, storekeeper and gunner.
- A: After you got out then you went to school under the G. I. Bill, is that right?
- C: Right.
- A: You transferred to Youngstown College at the time?
- C: Right.
- A: Now when did you become interested in becoming a commissioned officer?
- C: At the end of my senior year in about May of 1950. I went to the Marine Corps Reserves and inquired about a direct commission. At that time they said they had no program, but to enlist and through a program, you could attain a commission. Being an old soldier I knew to get what I had to get before I got in. Of course, if you remember in 1950 the Korean War broke out and these engineers I was applying for went directly to Korea. I didn't enlist in the Marine Corps, but waited and in June the National Guard of Ohio activated the 177th Anti-aircraft Gun Battalion. I went down and inquired and I did get a commission-- second lieutenant and was their first Battalion Administrative Assistant.

- A: You didn't actually have any training or education in the gunnery field or anything, is that true? Other than being a gunner aboard ship, you hadn't had any formal training?
- C: No. I qualified on the small arm weapons in the Coast Guard.
- A: What kind of initial training did you receive from the National Guard to qualify you for the post?
- C: I must say the Adjutant General in those days was very strict and for any promotions we had to attend the service schools. They would not accept correspondence courses. I attended the basic officer courses at Fort Bliss, Texas. I returned for an advanced course, a refresher course, in 1958 and in 1960 I went to the career advanced course in Fort Bliss, Texas.
- A: You say you were the first administrative assistant. What did this entail? What kind of a job was this you're speaking of?
- C: Well, this was the same as a full-time adjutant in the Army. However, you got paid through the state funding and you weren't out on active duty. You didn't get paid for your drills you attended in the two week summer field training. It was a paying capacity.
- A: So you worked five days a week as a civilian, is that it?
- C: Right. I was the adjutant on drill night in summer camp. I was the adjutant to test one battalion against another.
- A: How many officers were there at the time down there?
- C: At the beginning?
- A: Yes.
- C: We had a very skeleton crew. It was right after World War II and the Korean Conflict was upon us and this made recruitment very limited. For example, we had a firing battery to fire a ninety-millimeter gun. We would go to camp with the strength of forty men. They had to man two ninety-millimeter guns with a 584 radar, and with all the other equipment it was quite a remarkable job they did.
- A: In the regular Army, how many people would man one of these guns, for instance?
- C: The battery, the ninety-millimeter battery, would be around a 100 to 150.
- A: So you were shorthanded to say the least?
- C: To say the least, yes.

- A: What other units do you remember being there at the armory at the time you . . .
- C: Well, we were there; the 37th Division had two units there. Of course they were called up for the Korean Conflict and they left Youngstown in, I believe late 1951 or early 1952; I can't recall. I know we had a parade and we took them to the station. So that left us the headquarters battalion, the "A" Battery, and the 177th. "B" Battery was in Alliance, Ohio; "C" Battery was in Stuebenville, Ohio; and "D" Battery was in Warren, Ohio.
- A: So besides yourself, how many other people were there on a full-time basis?
- C: Full-time basis? For battalion there was two full-time and for each battery there was one full-time man.
- A: What was their responsibility during the five working days of the week?
- C: On the battalion level: to receive and disseminate higher headquarter directives, to take care of personnel files and payroll, to plan for weekly drills, to plan summer drill training, to get out training schedules, promotions, et cetera. On a battery level, the administrative there must take care of all unit supplies, property books, and do the administration, help the first sergeant with records, personnel files, carry through battalion directives, and that sort of thing.
- A: In the particular battery, the 177th that you were attached, were you the only officer in the unit or how many other officers were there?
- C: On full-time duty?
- A: No, just reserve.
- C: On the headquarters battery, offhand I would say we had about ten to twelve officers: Battalion commander, liaison officer, communication officer, attendant officer.
- A: About how many enlisted were there at the time?
- C: At headquarters battery, I would say thirty or thirty-five men at the time.
- A: Now out of these people that were there about what percentage would you say got called up for the Korean Conflict?
- C: As you know in the National Guard you cannot be called up individually. A unit must be called up. Our unit was not called up, the 177th. In the Korean Conflict, the 37th Division went and took two of the units out of the armory. The 179th, which

was the sister battalion to the 177th in Cleveland, they didn't go. The 180th in Dayton, Ohio, which was the first battalion activated back in probably 1947 or 1948, did go to Korea. So only one ninety-millimeter battalion out of the state went to Korea, went on active duty.

- A: What was the determination on them going? Do you happen to remember why did one battalion go and not the other?
- C: Selection through the Department of the Army, their training, their length of time in existence, their manpower and qualification their MOS's. They were in being three or four years before we were activated.

- A: I see. So after the Korean Conflict or about that period did you find it difficult to recruit people to the Guard or anything like that?

- C: Oh yes, during the Korean Conflict it was very difficult. Like I say, we would go to summer camp with a firing battery of thirty-five, forty men. Also when the Korean Conflict started we lost people who initially enlisted with us. This goes through the whole trend. After Korea, after the armistice, then we started to fill up with enlistees and officers. Then came the--I don't know if this is warranted or not--the Berlin Crisis. Don't forget, all of these people, most all of these people, had military background, military service people; they were obligated. You'll get that certain corps that would jump out, afraid to be called to active duty. After that came the Cuban Crisis and you got that again, the corps that would jump out.

Of course, after was Vietnam when the reserve was not called for the first time to active duty for a war; it became a sanctuary. All reserve forces, practically . . . The enlistments started to come in and we had waiting lists a mile long. What our main difficulty was was to be sure that the waiting list was very well policed. It was a battalion commander's death if within his unit, the full-time personnel would take bribes or do favors and put a person ahead for an interview.

- A: Was it happening or was there a big program to make sure it wasn't happening?
- C: It was happening. I find that most laws are the result of something that happened, not something that will happen. It was happening, not in this area to my knowledge, but in larger cities; it happened with individual cases. It became a very serious problem for a commander to deal with.
- A: So basically recruiting has been a problem, except during that period?

C: Yes.

A: Why would you think that an individual would join the National Guard versus another reserve unit, such as the Army Reserve Unit?

C: Well, I don't really know. I don't think a person is that much knowledgeable to do what I'm excited to do and that is basically in the Guard you must be called as a unit. Whereas in the Army, Navy and Marine Reserves, you can be called up individually. I don't think the recruit was that sophisticated per se. Now maybe individually they were, but per se I think they were attracted maybe to friends who belonged, or maybe the type of unit. Some people don't care to belong to infantry or engineering or anti-aircraft.

From the ninety-millimeter we went into a forty-millimeter anti-aircraft. It's fun to work around and shoot at planes. It's challenging; it's more challenging with radar and things of this nature that attract you. I think that has some input, the type of equipment we had.

A: Would you say that the individual who joins the Guard has been found to be the stereotype-type of person?

C: At first the individuals joining the Guard say back in 1951, 1952, 1953, were mostly all ex-servicemen who had a real, sincere love for the service; however, not that sincere to go and remain on active duty, but wanted to be part of it as an avocation. This was the type we were getting. These type of people would come back on Saturday morning and work and then on Monday afternoon and work, as opposed to the Vietnam type. They were there for one reason, not to go in the military on active duty. They were there for that two hour or four hour drill. When that was over, it was over and, "Good-bye, I'll see you in a month." That was the way it was. You had two different types of people. Of course, although we only had a low strength in the early days, in the 1950's, the people we had did so much work they made a full strength battery of two hundred men look bad. No question about it.

A: So definitely the type of individual that belonged back in those days or the type of unit you had in those days was much more beneficial than . . .

C: It was their avocation, no question about it.

A: Do you think that that might have to do too with the changing attitude towards the military that there appears to be in the United States today?

C: Well, the change of attitude now . . . Whose attitude? That's the point too. I'm not prepared at this time to really give

an opinion. I still think we have the corps of people who believe in the military and who really enjoy it as their avocation. I really believe that. I think the other type is being weeded out and thrown by the roadside now that the Vietnam War has cranked down. You don't hear this so much anymore. They, just for their own protection, stay out of the military.

A: You say you were the first full-time advisor down there?

C: Administrative assistant.

A: You had regular Army advisors attached. What was their job?

C: Their main job was to check our training, go over the training schedule and see it if complied with regulations, to assist in any way they could, to help us to prepare for federal inspections, to give our ATT test and summer drill training, to give general advice to young officers in the procedure, even in command. They were a great help as a general rule.

A: So these were regular active duty officers?

C: Right.

A: About how many are assigned to, let's say, the armory down here? How many are assigned?

C: You have one assigned to a battalion with the sergeant, usually, and then they would rotate every two or three years. There would be a tour for them. A tour program by their particular-- what's the term that I should use--Career Management Branch. This is part of their experience with the National Guard and to develop them in their overall career as an Army officer, to appreciate the reserve and Guard if they're ever called up into their organization at a later time.

A: How long did you stay down there as administrative assistant?

C: I stayed there as administrative assistant two years. I went from that full-time job to Austintown Fitch High School in 1953. Of course, I stayed on. I was transferred from headquarters to executive officer "A" Battery, to firing battery, then my career from there went right on through to battery commander.

A: Could you be a little bit more specific about that? What type of jobs did you have while you were attached?

C: I was attached to the . . . I went to "A" Battery. I was executive officer, so I was in charge of the gunnery, the ninety-millimeter gunnery program. I served as a battery



commander and I was also given additional duties as recreational officer, supply officer, et cetera. From there I went to battery commander of the "A" Battery. After serving in that capacity, I went back to headquarters as liaison officer whose duties were to communicate with higher headquarters at summer drill training and things of that nature. From there I went to battalion training officer as a three. Of course, the battalion training officer is responsible for all of the training of the battalion. From there to the executive officer and then battalion commander. During this time we went from the 177th Anti-aircraft Gun Battalion, ninety-millimeter to the 137th Artillery Automatic Weapons to the 437th Military Police Battalion.

A: You actually ended up being battalion commander of a Military Police Battalion?

C: Right. In April 1960, I was battalion commander here in Youngstown

A: Can you relate any interesting experiences as you were a battalion commander?

C: The riots of 1968. I can remember it very well because that was the first year I was at Austintown Fitch, in 1953. We had a week off for Easter vacation. Monday around noon I went down to the YMCA where I played handball. I played regularly. I played and about two o'clock I came in the dressing room and two outsiders came in and said that two policemen were shot on Hillman Street. I got dressed and immediately went up to the armory. I called the adjutant general and he directed me to go down to Mayor Flask's office and wait there. That was Monday afternoon. I returned home Saturday night about nine o'clock. In the meantime, adjutant general governor ordered up our battalion and we took our prearranged positions throughout the city. Things were going along quite well until on Tuesday--we probably would have gone home Wednesday afternoon--afternoon about four o'clock some white boys from outer, the outskirts, came into town on Hillman Street. As they were driving down the street they got scared. People started to crowd them and they put their foot on the accelerator knocking down a few people, not hurting them. They sped off towards South High School. In the meantime, one of our patrolling jeeps was coming up and the people were so frustrated that they stopped the jeep, pulled the driver out, took the weapon from the driver, turned the jeep over, and caught a five gallon gasoline can on fire. I arrived on the scene while the gasoline can was still burning and the fire truck came. At the time, they started throwing rocks at the fire truck and our sergeant fired a volley in the air and that stopped that. It's amazing the document of the National Guard magazine has this as the only shot fired in the riots of 1968. April of 1968, the one shot was fired.

A: That's interesting.

- C: Of course, we calmed down the residents and let them hack it from that point. We did catch the two white boys at South Field House. Of course, the main thing was to return them to their parents. But this little incident kept us there another four or five days.
- A: So this is actually the only call that you had as battalion commander?
- C: No. The riots of 1968 in the penitentiary. When they burnt down the Ohio State Penitentiary, we went down there for two weeks.
- A: Now did something like this count as your two weeks of active duty or did you still have to go on your two weeks?
- C: This is state duty. It has nothing to do with your two weeks of training.
- A: So you still had to go on your two weeks for training after that?
- C: Right. In fact, after April, I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky for two weeks. At that time they had a little problem here for a day or so, but nothing of any consequence. I wasn't called back. I went down to the commander college for a summer course.
- A: Now when you do go to classes like this mainly they're Army trained federal schools. The National Guard doesn't have any schools of their own, is that it?
- C: The National Guard has OCS. From that point on these schools are all funded; they are all programmed and run by the regular Army. Attendants in school are regular Army personnel, National Guard personnel, and Army Reserve personnel. Even the regular Army are assigned to these schools to satisfy their particular schooling at that level.
- A: In the history that you remember of the armory down here, has it been a situation where the National Guard participated in civic activities in the area?
- C: Well, if you take me back, I know they have participated in all the parades and put on demonstrations and things of this nature. I'm sure I've left out other detailed information that I can't recall at the moment.
- A: How about civic projects, such as cleaning up parks or things like this?
- C: Our battalion wasn't equipmentwise hired to make ball parks or fix up playgrounds. I know that the engineers in the Marine Corps have and the engineers in the Army Reserve have. We weren't equipment-oriented to do this type of thing. I know

that since I've left they have gone out and assisted in cleaning up rivers or lakes or ponds, the debris, with this ecology thing. I've seen this but I wasn't part of it at the time.

A: How does your family feel about your participation with the National Guard?

C: I've never had any objections from my wife or my daughter. We had a very good relationship with them. I never had any problem going away to school. I always went away to school which ran four to six months. My wife was always understanding and I had a very good experience here. On the other hand, some enlisted men also had to get out of the Guard because of the schooling criteria. They just couldn't get away because of their employer or because of family problems.

A: In your experience, if you had to do it all over again, would you do it this way or would you do it another way?

C: Oh, it's difficult. How far back? What I experienced now if I had to go back, I would go back to ninth grade in high school and prepare for the academy. I would probably have liked to be a career man only through the academy; I think this would be in line with my own particular likes and tastes. However, the way I did do it I've been very fortunate. I've been very, very lucky. Although I took advantage of opportunities and did qualify myself scholastically and all that, I was very fortunate.

A: Is there anything that you would like to add that I might not have asked you, Mr. Cook? I understand there is a difference in the manner of your commission in the National Guard than in other services. Could you explain that a little bit?

C: Yes. You must have the basic qualifications as you would for any service to be a commissioned officer. However, in the Guard you are commissioned twice. Your first commission is by the state of Ohio. The governor gives you commission by the rank you're coming in with. Now this is contingent upon federal recognition. In other words, you come into the Guard as a second lieutenant; you're commissioned second lieutenant. The federal government pays all your pay that you receive as soon as you belong to the organization, plus all of the equipment is given by the federal government as opposed to the state furnished armories. You cannot draw pay unless you are federally recognized. When you are federally recognized, it means that you are a reserve officer in the Army of the United States and you may go back and forth in the Guard and the reserves. If you're not federally recognized, then the governor will withdraw his commission and you will not be commissioned in the State of Ohio.

- A: How do you get paid on this or has it changed throughout the years?
- C: It changed within the last six months. Up until six months ago you would get paid after every quarter, every three months. Of course at the end of two weeks of summer drill training there would be a pay. Now as I understand it, they get paid every month. How this is going to work out--this is brand new--I don't know.
- A: It comes by check is that it? Your pay comes by check?
- C: Yes. Pay, drill pay comes by check. Usually summer field training pays in cash. However it has been in check on occasion depending on the financial resources available when you're doing the training.
- A: Where does this come from? Do you remember where it's mailed from?
- C: The pay?
- A: Yes.
- C: That's a good question. In the Guard you get your pay from Columbus, out at the capital. In the reserve, I can't recall.
- A: When you were activated for example, for the 1968 riots and everything, you were paid a daily wage, is that correct?
- C: You were paid equivalent to your rank, daily wage, not including subsistence quarters. It was basic pay.
- A: You were never reimbursed for subsistence quarters?
- C: Not on state duty. I would say never, but as a general rule . . . Of course, you are lodged at the armory and fed by the state. You have no cause really to . . .
- A: Even the officers are?
- C: Oh, yes.
- A: How is the reserve officer when you go on your two weeks training and everything fed there? Are you fed right out of the general mess, or do you have your own mess?
- C: We were fed out of the general mess. Of course, we must pay for each meal, as designated by the Department of the Army for any officer on active duty.
- A: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.