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Henry Eugene Cook (September 16, 1972)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. HENRY EUGENE COOK

September 16, 1972
Ottumwa, Iowa

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Henry Eugene Cook of Ottumwa, Iowa, today's date September 16, 1972, Arena interviewing. I'm Dick and you're Henry for this interview.

COOK: Right.

ARENA: We're now on officially. Now, Henry, first, if you don't mind, let me get some idea of your own background. Where and when were you born?

COOK: I was born in Ottumwa, Iowa, December 21, 1886. I'm an old man.

ARENA: I would say you are a native of Ottumwa. And from your own recollection of local history, from where does the word Ottumwa come and what does it mean?

COOK: There was an old Indian chief here Ottumwa, and it was named after him. Ottumwa, I believe they called it in Indian, Rippling Waters or Flowing River or something like that.

ARENA: I see. Where did you get your education?

COOK: I went to high school here and I went to Ames, Iowa, class of 1914, now known as the Iowa State University.

ARENA: Your major, if I may ask, was it a straight liberal arts or . . .

COOK: Civil engineering and then I--do you want a private . . .

ARENA: Oh yes, your education and your career to date, when you retired if you have?

COOK: I started my first job in engineering in 1907 as a rod man with the bridge and building department of the Chicago-Milwaukee-St. Paul Railroad, and then I was also assistant chief clerk and chief clerk to the superintendent to the railroad for two years. I was in Sioux City [Iowa] too in the bridge contracting business for two years. I was County Engineer in Ottumwa for four or five years. I was drainage engineer in both Wapello County and Davis County [Iowa] adjoining this county in drainage work, and in 1923 another fellow and I formed a partnership in consulting engineering.

ARENA: Would you want to give his full name?

COOK: Horace A. Brown, now deceased. And we closed out in '31 due to the depression and no municipal work going on. But in the intervening time I was asked to take the City Engineer's job in 1926 and which I held for two years. Then after we went out, we continued on our practice and in '31 the City Engineer of Ottumwa died and the mayor came and asked me to be City Engineer and my partner was the Water Works Superintendent. And so we were incorporated and we dissolved incorporation and he stayed as Water Works Superintendent and I was City Engineer up until the time when the base came, which I can elaborate later or carry right on.

ARENA: We'll take that detail later, please.

COOK: I went out to the base as Assistant Chief Field Engineer for the Engineering Department of Russell B. Moore and Company of Indianapolis [Indiana] who had been retained for it. They were an Indianapolis firm. They had been retained by the government to design the base, and I was called down to the hotel by the officer in charge of construction, H. C. Wilson. He said he had looked up and wanted me to take charge of the laying out of the buildings and utilities, beings that was my background, and I accepted and started work for them, with the engineers, September 1st, 1942. The base had men from Des Moines [Iowa]. . . . Do you want a little more history?

ARENA: Well, I would rather your own personal background without detail, to more or less bring us up to date.

COOK: All right. As I stated I was Assistant Chief Field Engineer. As we get toward the closing of it, the Chief Engineer for Russell B. Moore was called some place else and I was appointed Chief Field Engineer for them here and then the officer in charge of construction made me Chief Navy Inspector for the whole base.

ARENA: By the way, did you keep your civilian status all during this?

COOK: Up to this time I kept that. Then I had already made application for civil service rating, which I didn't know at the time, but when he appointed me that, I had already had my rating, so I stepped right in as Chief Navy Inspector in closing out all the contracts for the base and for the government, which naturally had to be okayed.

ARENA: Does that mean that you are in the Navy now?

COOK: I'm in the Navy now, when I became Chief Navy Inspector. Otherwise, I was with Russell B. Moore.

ARENA: I see.

COOK: And that's where I drew my paycheck from and then, of course, when I got that, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] came in and investigated and all that. And I was the Chief Navy Inspector and, of course, I was in the Navy all the time and then after the base was closed . . .

ARENA: What year was that closed if you recall, Henry?

COOK: Well I believe they opened it in 1943, when the Navy took it over. We still had closing out to do and all that stuff and I carried that all the way through. And when that was finished. . . . Of course, in the meantime I was in charge of maintenance, in charge of utilities and then they made me Chief Engineer of the station which I held until it was deactivated.

ARENA: This Ottumwa Naval Air Station? Was that the full official title?

COOK: No, I'm trying to think. They called it something first and then it became the Ottumwa Naval Air Station.

ARENA: We can recheck that.

COOK: There was a name ahead of that, until it was taken over.

ARENA: You said you were there until it closed. Do you recall when it closed as a Naval station?

COOK: I recall this that five years from the date, September 1st, I severed. Everything was through.

ARENA: In other words from 1943 plus five years.

COOK: 1942 to 1947.

ARENA: And that's when it was closed down.

COOK: That's right. That's when it started. I went with them when it started and it closed down. Then in the meantime we inventoried the whole base and I was back with the city. I was on leave of absence during this time as City Engineer.

ARENA: While you were with the Navy.

COOK: That's right. I was on leave of absence. And then we inventoried everything on the base. The agreement was that if the base was deactivated, the city of Ottumwa, having bought the land, would get it and the improvements back. I can tell a little story about that later how that came. The city bought the land. We had to take condemnation proceedings because it came that quick to us. We didn't know we were going to get the station.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you some personal questions from the standpoint. . . . I know we were talking off record about some of the organizations you belong to. I get the impression that you would know just about everybody in the community. Maybe your listing those organizations that you belonged to would help, in the area here.

COOK: Well, I am a member emeritus of the Iowa Engineering Society. Do you want some of the other orders?

ARENA: Your service clubs, anything you want to list yourself.

COOK: Well I was a member of the Rotary Club.

ARENA: Are you still a member?

COOK: No, I got out on account of my business took me out of town so much that I couldn't attend the meetings.

ARENA: Were you a member say back in that period 1943 while you were with the Navy?

COOK: No, I was not. Then later on I became a member of the Lions Club. I have been twenty-five years in that. And do you want me to list my lodge bodies?

ARENA: If you would like.

COOK: Well, I have been a past chancellor of the KP Lodge.

ARENA: That would be the Masons.

COOK: No, Knights of Pythias.

ARENA: I see.

COOK: And I have been a past president of the Moose Lodge. I am a 32nd KCCH Mason, and I'm a past master of our local lodge, and I am a life member of our local lodge, Ottumwa Lodge No. 16.

ARENA: Now just to be sure, do you want to say what these letters stand for because the secretary in typing them might not be too sure and I want to be sure we get it right.

COOK: Well the 32nd Knight Commander of the Court of Honor. It is an honorary degree conferred--you know nothing about it. It is just an honorary degree conferred upon you for your activity in the Masons. I am a member of the Shrine--the Masonic Shrine--I joined both the consistory and the Shrine I believe around 1914.

ARENA: You use the word consistory.

COOK: That's Masonic Consistory, and I am still a member of all those bodies.

ARENA: Do you have any sort of Naval Reserve status as a result of that tie with the Navy before?

COOK: No.

ARENA: In other words you severed all contact after you left.

COOK: When the base was deactivated, the commandant or the head fellow at Glenview, out of the Naval Air Station out of Chicago [Illinois]--you know about them, of course--well that's the head of this whole area--our district I believe is No. 5, wanted me transferred from here and take the same position over there at Glenview, [Illinois] which I turned down because I was too old to carry on Civil Service and get anything and then he wanted me to go some place overseas. Mother was living and I couldn't leave her.

ARENA: In other words you couldn't continue on in the Navy after that with any Naval status.

COOK: No, I was offered to continue but I did not continue due to private practice.

ARENA: Right. Let me ask you this, Henry. How would you describe that Naval Air Station back in 1943, realizing you don't have all the statistics in front of you, but from your own

general recollection, about how many were there from the standpoint of Navy people and civilian workers in 1943? And what was the size of Ottumwa back in 1943? In other words did this base dwarf the community or was it about equal--civilian and Navy people--to get a picture of what the area was like when the President was living here.

COOK: Well, the area was very similar, the population chart curve has always, until the last year, shown a real steady narrow growth or the curve was very gradual.

ARENA: How about roughly figures; what would you say the population was about? I realize you do not have statistics in front of you.

COOK: Around 32,000 or 33,000.

ARENA: What about the base itself around 1943?

COOK: I would say personnel there at the height of the base it was around 4,500 to 5,000. That is my recollection.

ARENA: What were the relations like between the town and the people on the base? For example, did the people on the base live on the base? Did practically all of them live in the community and how did they get along?

COOK: The captain and the executive officer lived on the base on two farmhouses that had been moved over there from taking acquisition of the farm land. We saved two houses and made them the captain and the exec quarters.

ARENA: When you say we, were you in charge of that particular operation? Were you one of the men who had something to do with it?

COOK: Well, I was City Engineer and that was before I knew anything about being with the base.

ARENA: That had taken place before you were there?

COOK: I was City Engineer all this time, you see, clear up to when I went out there to the base and I naturally had lots to do with the sheriff's preparing the farm land descriptions where we would take the condemnation proceedings on all the farms and everything was agreeable. They knew it was going to be. So it was just a matter of making application. Under Iowa law, the minute we condemned the land and gave them an offer, we could go ahead and take the land. Then if the property owner was not satisfied with the amount he was offered, then they could take it to court and settle it that way, but we could take immediate possession upon condemnation proceedings.

ARENA: As an overall statement, would you say there were hard feelings as a result of all this exchange of land.

COOK: No. I would say there might have been one or two dissatisfied but it was such a nice thing they thought for Ottumwa, that I think the people as a whole were more than pleased that the base was being located here.

ARENA: Do you recall yourself where President Nixon lived during this time?

COOK: No, I do not, because there were so many of them.

ARENA: Naturally. Do you recall though that those people who were not these high officers lived on the base in lesser housing or did they live in the community, or how were they provided for?

COOK: Well, of course, the young unmarried officers lived at the BOQ's, Bachelor Officers' Quarters. They had a nice home out there, like a hotel or motel. They had their own dining room and all.

ARENA: I notice that in this roster of officers, U.S. Naval Air Station, Ottumwa, Iowa.

COOK: That was the first name I think.

ARENA: Oh, I see, that we were looking for before. I will repeat that. U.S. Naval Air Station, Ottumwa, Iowa. The date for that is March 12, 1943, and they list President Nixon in this fashion: Richard M. Nixon, Lieutenant, j.g., A-V (S, USNR) And here's what I'm getting to. The address is 4th and Green Streets.

COOK: Yes, 4th and Green, right up here at 4th and Green.

ARENA: In other words that is fairly close . . .

COOK: Yes, 4th and Green Streets.

ARENA: . . . to where we are right now and we are right in the Chamber of Commerce Building.

COOK: This is 3rd Street, that is 4th Street and Green Street is the second block east.

ARENA: Now just to keep to that for a minute, do you know the precise building we are talking about. Is it an apartment building or a private residence?

COOK: The Smith Apartments. The Smith Apartments is still there and in use.

ARENA: I see. Do you recall that you yourself ever met President Nixon during this period? Do you recall you ever met him personally?

COOK: Yes, as I recall his office was in the back of the Public Works Building on the base. He was a legal advisor and Henry Pratt was the Public Works Engineer; [Charles] Chuck Brewster was the assistant and I was the Chief Engineer, and Chuck Brewster and I stopped in his office and maybe had a coke with him or coffee with him and then as we were back and forth maybe a "Hi" or something like that.

ARENA: Do you recall if you used first names with him? In other words, did he have a nickname? Was he Dick?

COOK: Yes, Dick Nixon. I don't know as I ever called him that way--just go in there--maybe I did and maybe I didn't.

ARENA: But you knew who he was?

COOK: Oh, yes. It wasn't anybody personal, but just like I knew practically all the officers out there because of my contact, and my position gave me contact with practically all of them.

ARENA: In connection with that and in connection with what we were discussing a moment ago about condemnation, would he have had anything to do with that aspect, the idea of condemning the property for the base?

COOK: The City of Ottumwa condemned all property.

ARENA: I see. And from the standpoint of making any contracts that might have dealt with that, would his office have had anything to do with that?

COOK: No. When his office came here, it was entirely Naval matters.

ARENA: I see. Do you recall ever having met Mrs. Richard Nixon, the President's wife?

COOK: I do not recall. They had an Officers' Club down here in the town.

ARENA: Do you recall where that was located?

COOK: You passed it coming in. They are building some buildings out there now.

ARENA: I was wondering from the standpoint of the actual address and maybe the intersection of the street.

COOK: Well the intersection is North Court and Elmdale.

ARENA: Would that still be there now?

COOK: They are remodeling the old Officers' Club and building two new buildings right by it for apartments. They are under construction now as I understand. I see them as I go by. No, at the Officers' Club I might have met her. I knew quite a few of the officers and there was quite a few of them I played golf with, but I never did with Nixon. I don't know as he played golf.

ARENA: How would you characterize the relations between the town and the naval personnel, such as the officers on one hand and maybe the enlisted men, if there was any difference, from the point of relations and the community?

COOK: As far as I know there was never any battles royal in the town or anything like that. Everything was pleasant. The Navy conducted themselves--the personnel--as gentlemen, which they are. And we had a flood in 1947, that was the biggest flood we have ever had here, and the Captain and our Public Works Department put all the personnel there, which they had their boats and all that stuff and the train, and they put them at the disposal of the city and due to them we saved a lot of lives and property.

ARENA: Of course, the President was not there at that time.

COOK: Oh, no.

ARENA: Do you recall if in 1943 when he was there that there were any joint civic undertakings? I am thinking maybe did the wives belong to local clubs and the men possibly belong to any of the local clubs? They may have been Kiwanians in civilian life. Was there that type of mixing too?

COOK: There was plenty of mixing as far as I know. I know in the different lodges or clubrooms or country clubs the officers would be in there. We would be altogether that way. Everybody was very friendly.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you know whether or not there is a Friends church, Quaker church, now or at that time in 1943?

COOK: To my knowledge there is no Friends church.

ARENA: Would you know if there any Friends in the community where he may have had contact with those of his same religious persuasion?

COOK: That I could not tell you and I do not know what church he attended. Personally I am a Methodist, always have been.

ARENA: Were you aware that his father had been a Methodist by any chance before he became a Quaker?

COOK: I was not.

ARENA: Would you be aware if his parents came to visit him from your own recollections or knowledge?

COOK: I do not know. I do not remember if they did.

ARENA: Would you know if he in any way spoke before a group in which you were a member of the audience for any particular reason at all?

COOK: I do not recall. My only contact with him was out at the base. I might have met him at the club, which I no doubt did--the Officers' Club--because I was out quite a few times. They made me an honorary member of the Officers' Club as a civilian. I was Chief Engineer of the station and I had all the privileges of the club the same as any officer and I intermingled with them all and they were a fine bunch of people.

ARENA: Is there anything in the way of special conditions, we'll say, or special events that took place around this time, 1943, while the President was here that come to mind? You mentioned the flood in 1947. Was there maybe a fire or any disaster or any happy event, not necessarily a tragic one, but anything at all?

COOK: I know what you're trying to get to, but I do not recall anything exceptional. If it was brought to mind maybe I would, but I do not recall myself.

ARENA: Do you recall that, say, during this period any unusual person, I'm thinking maybe even President Franklin Roosevelt, or any unusual dignitary came out to dedicate something on the base and the President as well as you may have been at the event?

COOK: I do not. I presume probably some of our representatives or senators came down through here, but not that I recall.

ARENA: If this isn't too personal and for the record, of course, do you recall that although the relations between the Navy people and the townspeople were good in general, was there anything like people looking down their noses because this was away from the big cities, away from where a Navy person might have found life a little more exciting, the bright lights of Broadway or anything like that? Did you get the impression that there was any unhappiness because they had been stationed here in Ottumwa rather than a big city?

COOK: As far as I know and can feel the sentiment at that time, we were very proud to have that bunch in here. They were perfect gentlemen from the lowest midshipman--or whatever you want to call him--up to the captain. They were just fine people and the city just took them in very well and was very happy to have them. They wished the base had stayed there.

ARENA: I believe we were discussing this off the record. You know a part of this interview is for straight research. In other words, you might give me some leads on names and that sort of thing. We were discussing this off the record and I would like to get it on the record. You mentioned that you did know the commander and his name is, according to the same record that I have in front of me, Dorris D. Gurley.

COOK: That's correct.

ARENA: And as far as you know, you do not know where he is now or do you receive any communication with him?

COOK: Not from him. I met him quite often while he was here.

ARENA: You did mention the name of a gentleman who your wife and you exchange Christmas cards.

COOK: Yes. Stanley Haight. He was the Security Officer out there. He lives in San Francisco [California] and we visited with them a couple days here a few years ago.

ARENA: And he recalls that period and recalls you. Do you happen to know if he recalls the President himself personally?

COOK: No, because this was before Dick was . . .

ARENA: Oh, I see, he was not here in 1943 this Haight?

COOK: Oh, yes, he was here. I see what you mean.

ARENA: I am wondering if he would be worth checking from the standpoint of an interview in the future.

COOK: If we did I don't recall because we recalled plenty of reminiscences of this base. Our wives were back and forth. We were at their house; they were at ours. We played golf together--Stanley Haight and Dawson Blackmore out of Chicago.

ARENA: And he's located now?

COOK: I think he's in Chicago. We get cards from him. He's retired. Stanley Haight's retired. Charles Brewster, he was the Assistant Public Works Officer. He's down in Texas or Oklahoma some place. We hear from him right regularly. Henry Pratt, he was out of New York I believe. He was a Public Works Officer, and there was a U. C. Wilson. He was the officer in charge of construction at the base. He was back several times, looked me up and we were together. And Bob Timmerman, Robert Timmerman. He was in charge of all the BOQ's and the mess halls. He was the head of that.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: I believe you were going to give us an account of the establishing of the base here at Ottumwa in the first place. Please do. Just a brief account of when it took place and if it involved your having to go to Washington and so forth. You were a part of the original group that helped to set the base up in the first place?

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: And about when was that, Henry?

COOK: Well, along about 1940 we talked about--the people in Ottumwa--about having a base. There seemed to be something in the past that maybe we would get a base if we furnished the land. But before that time though, I had already worked up the drawings for an airport here according to the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] rules. I had visited Kansas City [Kansas] and had them gone over, and so four of us went into Washington and met with our senator and representative.

ARENA: Excuse me, did you give a name there?

COOK: Senator [Clyde LaVerne] Herring and Representative [Karl Miles] LeCompte. And we went in there and they got us interviews with all kinds of highups in the Navy and Army. And we showed them our prints, offered them what we would do and everything like that was presented and we came home. All of a sudden one day in 1942 we got word here from the representative--

I'm sure it was LeCompte--that the contract for the engineering had been let and the contract for the building of the air base had been let, unbeknownst to us. The City of Ottumwa immediately took proceedings to condemn the land for the 1442 acres of good old Iowa land was condemned for it.

ARENA: 1400 acres.

COOK: 1442.3 I believe that was it.

ARENA: Is that what it still is today? I realize it is no longer officially a base, but that original tract is still pretty well intact.

COOK: Yes, it is. Some of the buildings have been torn down from the base naturally, but the agreement was that if the base was ever dissolved, the buildings and everything would come back. We gave them the land to build on but we would get it back in case the base was all blowed up, you might say.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, has that taken place?

COOK: Taken back? We have the base.

ARENA: And by we the city of Ottumwa?

COOK: I mean the city of Ottumwa has the base and all.

ARENA: And today how is it used?

COOK: Well, we've taken the base and the farm land is put out under--shared with the farm management. We sold some of the land for industry--beautiful buildings.

ARENA: Sold it outright for private purposes.

COOK: That's right.

ARENA: And excuse me. Just to be sure, when you said there is a shared farmland. . . .

COOK: Well, I meant there is the Farmers National out of Omaha [Nebraska]. They come in and do all the work fifty-fifty.

ARENA: Is that a government agency or a private association of sorts?

COOK: It's private because . . .

ARENA: Would it even be a cooperative?

COOK: No. Because my daughter and I happen to have eighty acres over here and we're using the same firm--this firm is not a cooperative--they take and come in and farm management and when you're through, you split with them. They furnish all the equipment and do the plowing and everything. You furnish the land and half the seed and that and then you share in half of the proceeds.

ARENA: Just to be sure, was there anything like that during that period say during 1943? You didn't use any of the land for farming purposes then?

COOK: No. That was Navy. The Navy owned it as far as we were concerned. The city owned the land but the Navy had it and would have had it if they had continued on.

ARENA: But just to be sure and you said no, I believe, there was nothing like the shared farm management idea. I am thinking, you know, of the idea of shortages during the war, maybe they might have used some of the land for produce purposes, but they didn't.

COOK: No, not to my recollection. No, I know there wasn't anything. In fact out there we designed a golf course for the place.

ARENA: And you did say that golf was played. Was there a golf course right on the base?

COOK: No, no. It was in the approved projects along with a chapel. And when they approved that you would think the base was going to stay, because they never approve a chapel as I understand it until the base becomes permanent.

ARENA: Excuse me. To be sure, you say there was a chapel built on the base?

COOK: No, no. We had the plans--and when I say we had, I mean the Navy had all this. We would project every year for one more year. It was a five-year projection forecast.

ARENA: And one of the projections was this chapel?

COOK: That's right.

ARENA: But it was never approved and therefore never built.

COOK: It was approved but never built because we deactivated before we got the money for construction. The whole base was deactivated.

- ARENA: How about some of the recreational facilities on the base? Was there actually a pool built, for example, a bowling alley or anything like that?
- COOK: We had bowling alleys, we had the first real authentic fifty-meter pool--I guess in Iowa--and we had rifle ranges.
- ARENA: How about movie theatres or stage shows?
- COOK: Yes, the recreational building had a big stage for shows and we had the drill hall and we had basketball games with the other stations. We had football games with other stations out at the high school field until we built a football regulation field at the base.
- ARENA: Let me ask you the other question in reverse. I said, did the Navy people have opportunity to mingle with the community in the town? We said yes. But how about the reverse. Did the community come on to the base in any way, say the high school, to use the pool or use the theatre. Was that never allowed during this time?
- COOK: To my recollection all our inter-parties were taken with other bases. They would fly their crews in here from Hutchinson, Kansas, and from Texas and all around and we would fly our bunch down there.
- ARENA: How about tours, in the sense of the city people being conducted on information tours or anything like that?
- COOK: At the start they had tours, you know, but from then on the base was secured.
- ARENA: And strictly business I take it.
- COOK: Strictly business. Of course, anybody could get in through proper procedures.
- ARENA: Mr. Cook, I am very grateful for this additional background which helps set this in the proper perspective. In other words, the life of the base, from the standpoint of history was quite short really, not too much before the war and not too much after the war.
- COOK: And the idea was to get a flyer in so he could fly as quick as possible. That was the intent of the base.
- ARENA: I see. The basic purpose of the base was to train men to fly in the Navy?

- COOK: And they figured if they could get them out in a week's time and get them over there, that might help win the war by having more personnel.
- ARENA: Just as a matter of interest, was there any cooperation with nearby schools? Were classes held off the base for any reason? Were any civilian teachers borrowed, maybe in languages or something else and they taught on the base.
- COOK: No. The only teaching out there was by the personnel for anything pertaining to flying. They had their link trainers and they had their schools for that, you know, by the personnel of the base.
- ARENA: And just out of interest too, given your personal responsibilities here, did you ever come across some idea as to how large this base was in comparison to other U.S. Navy bases--Naval Air Bases--from the standpoint of its position in the country as a whole?
- COOK: Well, we were a replica of the base at Hutchinson, Kansas. Our plans for the two stations were very comparable, and I might add that at our base all the water mains were cast iron, the sewers were ceramic tile; we had our own generating station there as a standby and it was made of brick, and all the buildings, except the first two that were emergency, were all built with ceramic tile.
- ARENA: For the uninitiated like myself, is that good or bad? In other words is that tending toward permanency?
- COOK: That is permanent. Ceramic tile is used for all sanitary sewers.
- ARENA: In other words you used the best of equipment?
- COOK: It was built apparently to be a permanent base. Hutchinson was not, I understand.
- ARENA: But again, from the standpoint of size in the country as a whole, do you have any idea, was it number one, two, three or four?
- COOK: I never got to visit around.
- ARENA: That could be checked out. I just thought you might have heard somewhere along the line.
- COOK: No. The gas mains were all underground, the steam mains--heating to all the buildings--were underground. It was built for a permanent base. Out there they called it the little Annapolis of the air.

ARENA: The little Annapolis of the air.

COOK: It was built for that.

ARENA: Well, to bring us up to date if you don't mind, Henry, how many of these buildings are still here from that original group of buildings, say classrooms, administration, cafeteria?

COOK: Well, then later on after a couple or three years the Waves came in, the Order of the Waves, and a lot of those buildings were put up originally out of frame. Then they started building all permanent buildings. When I say permanent, I mean ceramic-tiled walls and concrete floors. Out there now those frame buildings are all torn down.

ARENA: But the well-built ones are still there?

COOK: They're all there.

ARENA: Percentagewise, how many are still left, from the standpoint, if they could handle, I think you said 44,000 was it at its height, about how many could the base handle now?

COOK: Well, they could handle the same amount if they built a few more quarters.

ARENA: You are saying the base is pretty much still the way it was then.

COOK: The swimming pool is there; the drill hall is there.

ARENA: Is the swimming pool still in use?

COOK: No, it's decked over for industry and one of the hangars--they were the biggest hangars you ever saw--the storm took all to pieces, but the others . . .

ARENA: Do you remember the year of that particular storm?

COOK: No, I do not.

ARENA: Was it after the war do you think?

COOK: Yes, it was after the base took it over and they demolished that. But the other buildings, the permanent buildings, the warehouses--we had one large storehouse and three smaller ones--were big but they were strong. And also, I might add that the Milwaukee Railroad--the Navy built a spur track about four and a half miles from the junction of the Milwaukee Railroad to the base and we still own that and it's in use to bring materials out to the base now--can bring crops out or anything we want to.

ARENA: Well, Mr. Cook, I want to thank you very much for this direct history of which you were a part, in not only telling it but you were there. Thank you very much again for giving me the time and this information.

COOK: I appreciate the privilege of telling it. I believe I know the base about as well as anybody--I mean how it happened, the whole story, and I think that was one of the five nicest years of my life to be associated out there with such a bunch of fine people. I made a lot of fine acquaintances. As I say we conversed personally, and [William] Bill Coup used to come back every time.

ARENA: And you say you recall a Mr. Coup in 1943. He may have known the President.

COOK: No, he was a Public Works Officer.

ARENA: But was he here in the year 1943, that is on the base that is what I am wondering. You are not sure about that?

COOK: He came in later on.

ARENA: I see. That's what I wanted to check. Thank you very much.