

# Cooper, Harley and Vickery, Obert C. Interview pt 1

## 5-28-90 (1)

[Speaker 3]

When did you join the service?

[Speaker 1]

1942. No, 1942, the year 1943. I was drafted.

[Speaker 3]

What, did you have your choice of what service you'd go into after you were drafted?

[Speaker 1]

They just sent me from Homer, New York, was my injection center. They sent me there to Buffalo, and Buffalo to Miami Beach, where I took the basic training, and basic training to 92nd Army Air Base in Hopefield, North Carolina. And then I was there for a while, and then I went from there to Portland, Indiana, and then from there I came to Stone, California, and overseas.

[Speaker 3]

Okay. What branch of the service were you in?

[Speaker 1]

I was in the 92nd Army Air Force down in Fort Bragg.

[Speaker 3]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And then when they transferred me to Indiana, I was with the 375th Air Force Group, 5th Squadron.

[Speaker 3]

Okay. What do you remember most about leaving home?

[Speaker 1]

Well, when we was on the train going or coming, we stopped at a small town. There was a whole mess of people there. And they said, welcome us back.

We did come back. Okay.

[Speaker 3]

Do you remember about how old were you when you went in the service?

[Speaker 1]

I'm 68 now. I'm about 21, 22, I'd say.

[Speaker 3]

Did you have any brothers or sisters in the service?

[Speaker 1]

I had one brother that was—two brothers. They was in Germany in their home.

[Speaker 3]

Did they survive the war and come back and support you? Yes. Describe your training.

What were you actually trained for, in other words?

[Speaker 1]

Well, that I really don't know because when I went to Miami Beach, they gave us a rifle and we trained the rifle down there for about, I think, two or three months, how to carry it, how to clean it, how to take care of it. And then when I came to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the field, they turned the guns in and I had the job at 92nd Army Air Base taking care of the officers' mess hall. When the officers came in for a flight, we gave them a ticket and they would go in, eat, etc.

[Speaker 5]

Mm-hmm.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. I don't always say this, I was a jilted man to do every odd job.

[Speaker 3]

Where did you first end up overseas?

[Speaker 1]

We landed in Australia.

[Speaker 3]

Brisbane?

[Speaker 1]

Brisbane, Australia.

[Speaker 3]

Did you go by water from San Francisco?

[Speaker 1]

USS Lower Line. How long did it take? About a month.

[Speaker 4]

About 30 days.

[Speaker 1]

The ship, that USS Lower Line, was a sister or niece, whatever you want to call it, to the Queen Elizabeth.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah, it was a big, fast ship, wasn't it? Because that's getting there pretty fast compared to what it took a lot of them to get there.

[Speaker 2]

It circled all around the city. It took 30 days to get there. I went down south of Milwaukee, way down south, and then over in Australia.

[Speaker 1]

They didn't take us in a straight course?

[Speaker 2]

No. No, if they took a straight course, we wouldn't have been here.

[Speaker 3]

No, the subs got you, I guess, wouldn't they?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, so what happened to you in Australia?

[Speaker 1]

We were just there for like a visit. Ten days. Ten days, just get off the ship and get reorganized.

There were these other troops on the ship that we weren't aware of. And one thing I remember about it, going down the gangplank in Australia, I was hit by a duffel bag. I got hit in the duffel bag and wound up with a water on the knee project.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, did it put you out of action there?

[Speaker 1]

No, we wasn't in action.

[Speaker 3]

I mean, that duffel bag didn't really do any damage?

[Speaker 1]

No, I think they just lost the balance.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, what next after Australia?

[Speaker 1]

We went to New Guinea.

[Speaker 2]

No, we went to Fort Morris.

[Speaker 1]

Fort Morris, yes, Fort Morris, Australia. Then we went to America and New Guinea.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, what did you do in New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, about everything. He has a picture of me filling the shower over there for our outfit. And wash pots and pans and doing KP work.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah, what was the outfit doing? Were they doing bombing raids?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they took the food and supplies up front, and they'd bring back maybe the prisoners or something like that, whatever they had.

[Speaker 3]

Troop carrier outfit?

[Speaker 1]

Troop carrier, yeah.

[Speaker 3]

And that was in, what did you tell me?

[Speaker 1]

Forty... Forty-three. Forty-two, forty-three, yeah.

We came back in 1945.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, and what next from there?

[Speaker 2]

New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we went to New Guinea. Went to, let's see, Fort Morris.

[Speaker 2]

No, Doberdur, right?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Doberdur.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, Doberdur. And we went from there to Fort, to Napsat.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, no, first we went back to Fort Morris. We went from Doberdur right back to Fort Morris.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that's right.

[Speaker 2]

That's where I went on vacation. And then from Fort Morris we went to Napsat.

[Speaker 1]

Napsat, and that's when they sent us back for, when I took my vacation, or leave, for about ten days. I went to another part of Australia. Darwin.

Recuperation, they called it.

[Speaker 3]

Right, R&R.

[Speaker 1]

Rest three lives.

[Speaker 3]

It says, what memories do you have of the men you served with? Did you keep in touch with any of them?

[Speaker 1]

I never kept in touch with any of them until I received a letter from Sergeant Bauer in California.

[Speaker 3]

That's right.

[Speaker 4]

Was that a year ago or something?

[Speaker 1]

A little over a year ago.

[Speaker 4]

Yeah. Well, they started having these reunions.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they started having reunions.

[Speaker 4]

But they had it after he had the stroke and what, so he couldn't go to any of them and what. But he said they started having that stuff too late. I mean, most of all, he wasn't getting too old.

[Speaker 1]

Well, the Sergeant Bauer sent me a letter with their names and all that, and then I got a letter from another fellow that was in our outfit, and he gave me a list of all these reunions they've had in California, Florida, and Texas.

[Speaker 5]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That's all they were. We had guys from 44 different states. He said that they wrote to him, and he got the letters back because they wasn't forward to me.

That's something I couldn't figure out.

[Speaker 3]

Well, that last place with the funny name you said you were now, what was the name of that place?

[Speaker 1]

Zab Zab. Zab Zab.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah. Where was that? I don't know.

I mean, what country was that in?

[Speaker 1]

That's over in South Pacific.

[Speaker 3]

New Guinea. New Guinea. New Guinea, okay.

Where from New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

North, wasn't it? Yeah, North.

[Speaker 3]

Fort Morris.

[Speaker 2]

And from Zab Zab, we went back to Fort Morris.

[Speaker 5]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

And it changed a lot. The Australians that took over Fort Morris by then, and you had to wear day-to-day uniforms and stuff like that, and we looked like the bums.

[Speaker 1]

That was the truth, too.

[Speaker 2]

And from there, we went to Biak.

[Speaker 3]

That's where I didn't do most of the talking. I don't think this is going to pick you up as far as it is.

[Speaker 1]

We're not going to go there. Actually, I forgot somewhere. Okay.

We went there to Biak, and then he was there for a while.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, and then he took us over part of the time, but all of us not went to the Carolina Islands. No.

[Speaker 1]

Similar. He went to Carolina. I stayed in the outfit.

They divide the outfit in two groups. You go here and you go there. But I stayed in the outfit until I came home, and he was in— I went everywhere.

He went everywhere.

[Speaker 3]

Where was the last place you were now before you came home?

[Speaker 1]

Japan. Our outfit went to Japan to catch a boat from Biak. We came back in what they call banana boat.

Thirty days.

[Speaker 3]

How long had the war been over when you got into Japan? Do you remember about how long?

[Speaker 1]

About a month or two, something like that.

[Speaker 3]

How did the Japanese act towards you? Never seen one. The only ones I've seen was the Dutch.

Headless. So you all weren't allowed to get out and mix with them, were you?

[Speaker 1]

No, they wouldn't even let us mix with the Natives over there either. Although they were some good Negro or colored people, what they call Natives. They'd do your washing, which I did 25 cents.

And your uniform would be stiff. Well, I was a boy. Were you ever under fire?

I was under red alert.

[Speaker 2]

You remember at Doberdory. That's when I started to wake you up, and I thought, well, I won't make a sound.

[Speaker 4]

There were box holes and things.

[Speaker 1]

There was a box hole, and I jumped into it and got caught.

[Speaker 3]

You mentioned you had some contact with some of the Native people.

[Speaker 1]

About, I mean, about two, five or nine years. I couldn't speak the language.

[Speaker 3]

What did you think of them?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, to me, some of them were pretty good, some of them I wouldn't trust. About the same, I mean.

[Speaker 3]

About the same as everybody?

[Speaker 1]

No. There's all different tribes in there, too, whether they're Native or non-Native. You couldn't tell who was the enemy and who wasn't.

[Speaker 3]

You didn't get up into the Philippines, did you, before you went to Japan?

[Speaker 1]

No, no. Yeah, we had laid in.

[Speaker 2]

We landed at Subic Bay.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, Subic Bay.

[Speaker 2]

We went to San Antone, and from San Antone, I went on to, I went about 30, 40 miles from, from, No, we went right straight after, we split and went to New Guinea.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, you went from New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

I went up to New Guinea.

[Speaker 3]

To where?

[Speaker 2]

Biak.

[Speaker 3]

Biak. Biak to where?

[Speaker 2]

And I went over to Talapert, Talud, Talud, oh yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And then up to, There's another island up there.

[Speaker 2]

Mendora.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, Mendora.

[Speaker 2]

Oh yeah, okay.

[Speaker 3]

That was in the Philippines, wasn't it?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I hit Mendora.

[Speaker 3]

Okay.

[Speaker 2]

We landed at Subic Bay, San Antone.

[Speaker 3]

Did you get, were you able to take many photographs while you were over there? No, we weren't allowed to. You weren't allowed to?

[Speaker 1]

No, they told us, what they told us there, if you're going to write home, you write, write about the weather, but not tell how severe it was, like hot, rainy, muddy and all that.

[Speaker 2]

Did they say somewhere in New Guinea or somewhere in the Philippines?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they just said somewhere in New Guinea, somewhere in the Philippines, somewhere here, somewhere there. And they told the story, I don't know how true it was, but they told the story, none of the captains got it all together, and they were telling the story, they said if you guys wanted to write home about the weather, they said you can do like this one soldier did, and he wrote home and he says, it's so hot here, and mosquitoes are so big, he says they could take a turkey and chug it six miles away, and he says that guy got six months in the guardhouse for it. I'll never forget that story.

[Speaker 2]

Some said it's no good here, in New Guinea. Yeah, I'll never forget that one.

[Speaker 3]

What did you plan to do when the war was over? Did you have any special plans?

[Speaker 1]

Well, when I went in, I worked in a restaurant, and I wanted to become a chef, and not work in a hotel or something. I preferred to work at the complete high school, but then I didn't plan on it, because my father, I was sick with my father, so then I went down to the A, applied for a job application, all that, and I had to go to Ithaca, which is about an hour, an hour and a half, or not quite that far, I'd say about an hour from Portland, and I went over and took the exam, and according to them, the examination I took and everything, according to them, I was a second class mechanic, and I didn't know anything about cars. I still don't.

So I told them, I told them about it, and they said, well, here's your paper right here.

[Speaker 4]

Yeah, that's pretty good.

[Speaker 1]

When I came back, a week later, the president of the state of Portland got the paper back and everything, and he said, yeah, you're a second class mechanic. I know where the gas comes in, I know where the oil comes in, and that's it. Nothing else.

I don't. I still don't.

[Speaker 3]

What did you end up doing for a living?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I had worked in a factory for a while, and then that started holding up, and I went to work in a pipe writer company, and they started cutting wages, and then I went to a job shop, and I had about two and a half years in a bakery, and I had 15 years with a pipe writer company, and then I had about a year and a half of a job shop, where they did work for IBM and all the small other companies that wanted to have something done, and that followed, so I went to work. I was out of work five weeks, and I went to work for Paul Finchley Micro in Portland, and I retired from there.

[Speaker 3]

What kind of company? What did that company do?

[Speaker 1]

They make filters.

[Speaker 3]

I see. For what use? For medical.

I see, okay.

[Speaker 1]

They use them out in the field, like building gas that your big gas lines come in.

[Speaker 3]

Okay. Did you have any feelings about the people of draft age that weren't in the service? Four Fs for one thing or another?

Bobby?

[Speaker 1]

Didn't bother me. Bothered a lot of them, but they really didn't bother me. I noticed one fellow over on there, he said that he was sitting in this restaurant where I worked part-time, and he said, I'll tell you, he stuttered quite a bit, and he said, I'll be here when you go, and I'll be here when I come back.

A week later, they nailed him. He went to Germany, and he died later on.

[Speaker 3]

How did the war change you?

[Speaker 1]

Not too much.

[Speaker 3]

Don't feel like it did?

[Speaker 1]

No, I don't think.

[Speaker 3]

It was the country.

[Speaker 1]

I wouldn't want to go back over there. I probably wouldn't know just what's going on, but as far as life changed, I don't think so.

[Speaker 3]

How do you think it changed the country?

[Speaker 1]

Well, that's what we talked about last night out here.

[Speaker 4]

I said, I think they forget about what Japan had done, and here they got schools over here now, and half the people are Japanese.

[Speaker 1]

I think we're in a country now that's making a state that's letting Japanese, most of the Japanese, come into this country, taking over the banks, the schools, and colleges, and the big manufacturing companies, and building them here because they're laborers. They're wage scavengers, way cheaper than what they are here.

[Speaker 3]

What do you remember most about coming home?

[Speaker 1]

I was in California. Well, when I got back on the boat, got in California, got on the train, and went from California to Texas, across, and went into Fort Dix, New Jersey. And when I got into that night, it was raining, and the 82nd Airborne, part of them, had just returned from the other side.

And then, two days later, they called us and just gave me a ring of light, and they wanted to know how many of them were ready to enlist. They said it was a good opportunity, and I said, all the way.

[Speaker 5]

All the way home.

[Speaker 1]

All the way home.

[Speaker 3]

Do you remember when you were discharged?

[Speaker 1]

Fort Dix, New Jersey.

[Speaker 3]

What was the date?

[Speaker 1]

I can't remember what the date was.

[Speaker 3]

What month?

[Speaker 4]

October, wasn't it?

[Speaker 1]

Forty-five? Yeah. Because I got home Halloween night.

[Speaker 5]

October 24th? October 24th.

[Speaker 1]

Just about a week, I'd say about a week before. About 20 seconds, I don't know.

[Speaker 3]

145, right? I think so. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Wrapped it around, left one end open, wrapped it around, and they had all mashed potatoes, containers. They had 65-gallon cans and everything inside that it was set on. And over the top, they put a parachute.

I looked at the picture, and you'd say, oh, that's a real picture. Because everything was right up to date on it.

[Speaker 3]

Let's see.

[Speaker 1]

Maybe take photos or something like that. I wrote for another copy years ago, but this one here is pretty shabby. And it was printed by the Australian company, and they said no.

They just made that one bag. It was probably a couple of years after the war. And they said they could not print it because the United States government was giving permission just to print so many books.

So I was just lucky that I had that.

[Speaker 5]

Yeah.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, this is Stan Tinsley again. I am now interviewing Mr. Cooper as to his World War II experiences. Mr. Cooper, when did you join the service?

[Speaker 2]

August 7, 1942.

[Speaker 3]

Okay, did you volunteer? Yeah. Okay, and what branch of service were you in?

[Speaker 2]

Well, the Air Force first. Air Corps, as they called it then. Air Force.

Well, I didn't join the Air Force, though. They sent me down to Camp Forrest, Tennessee. And from Camp Forrest, I went down to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

And then when I left Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, I went up to 19 New Jersey and then I found out I was in the Air Force. I didn't take no tests or anything for it. I don't know.

Well, I guess the reason they put me in the Air Force, I guess I'd been in Alaska before the war and during the war.

[Speaker 4]  
CCC Camps?

[Speaker 2]  
I was with the CCC Camps. They had two camps up there. It's Annette Island, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Annette Island is 30 miles from Ketchikan, you know, an island. And we was building in our base, seaplane base, and first I had to, we had to run a there was two camps of us, A and B, and we was ice in A, I think. And we and from A and we had to run a pipeline through over to airfield over to officer's quarters.

They was going to make officer's quarters. And then after that, we had to build roads. And then after that, we had to the war come up, and we had to fix elephant huts, you know, big huts for ammunition, store ammunition.

And also had to both, that A and B both, they had to clear land for the seaplane base. That was CCCK? Yeah.

so we was just there when the war broke out. When we had to sign up for CFI for a year. And so they sent us back before the year and in May.

And we went from and they sent us to Snohomish, Washington. And they shipped us on home. And then I stayed home for about a month or so.

Two months, maybe. I was going to have to go anyway. I didn't even know the pandemics or nothing, so I went on going.

Well, I went down about two or three weeks before down to Clinton. And I seen them guys get drafted. And I said, that's not for me.

Some of them were doing the run and everything. And I said, I'll just go myself. And so I just came to Knoxville and joined the boat team.

well, then well, when I was in Atlantic City, I found out I was in the Air Force. So they sent me to St. Joseph, Missouri. That's 52 miles north of Kansas City.

[Speaker 4]  
And I They didn't have no barracks or nothing there. They had to build their own barracks.

[Speaker 2]  
We lived in tents and things. There was just 50 of us. And we started it out.

and then I was No. Yeah, Portland, Indiana. And then from Portland down to Louisville, Kentucky.

No, I was still in Louisville, Kentucky. And then Portland, Indiana. And then I was down to They shipped me from Portland down to Longberg, Maxton, North Carolina.

And From Longberg, Maxton, North Carolina. They shipped us back to Portland, Indiana. And from Portland, we went to We went to Kemp's Dome in California.

Well, then we went overseas.

[Speaker 4]

And We didn't even get a furlough of any kind.

[Speaker 2]

No, I didn't. I wasn't back that time. I didn't think about it.

And then I shipped around a lot. And I landed in Brisbane, Australia. And I stayed there 10 days.

I don't know much about the boat. It seemed pretty. You know, we never had I mean, really, truthfully, I never did even hear of Australia.

I mean, I never had paid no attention. In school, I think we had a couple of days of it. A couple of lessons on it.

I just noticed it is an upside-down country. So I really didn't know what to expect. And then we went to Then we went from there by boat up to Port Moresby, New Guinea.

And we stayed there for about Oh, two or three weeks, more or less. And they shipped us. We flew over to to Goberdura.

And we stayed at Goberdura for six months, about. And that was in January. We'd come back to Port Moresby.

So they said, well, they could let three percent go on furlough to Australia. So they called me in. They said, you ever got a furlough, have you?

And I said, no. And so they said, well, you can go to Sydney, Australia for 30 days. And I didn't even know what Sydney was.

And so they put us on a boat. Well, it's taken, they was coming in and we was going out. They sent the wounded and stuff with us.

There was 800 of us went down to Australia, Sydney. We got down to Sydney and it surprised me because it was a big town. I think it was over 2.5 million people. It was a little different than it was at Brisbane. At Brisbane, they was more more on the wartime. In Sydney, it was just like Miami Beach.

I mean, only once it was connected only one that was affected by the war was those that had sons in the service. But the rest of the people, I guess, didn't even know the war was on.

See, we had, they had a lot of Australians up in the Northern Territory would come down there to Sydney and Melbourne.

They wouldn't ever stop at Brisbane. Cause that was where, Brisbane was where MacArthur planned on stopping the Japanese. They didn't plan on that.

I mean, they, no I'm telling you, all their men was mostly over in the middle.