

## **Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**

### **Deryck Cook Interview**

**Conducted by Adina Langer**

**August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Transcribed by Brevin Barnes**

Deryck John Cook was born in the English village of Exton in 1938 during World War Two. After the war, he would pursue education as an engineer before moving to Toronto, Canada, then to Detroit, Michigan, and finally to Georgia. He has written a memoir that details many of his early memories that came from living in England during the height of the Blitz and World War Two. In this interview he describes a few major experiences in his childhood that have had a profound impact on his life.

### **Full Transcript**

We're recording

Interviewer: Fabulous! So, uh, my name is Adina Langer, and I am the curator of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University. Today is August fifth, 2021, and I'm here at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education with Deryck Cook for a Legacy Series interview during which we will remember his childhood in the UK during World War Two. First, do you agree to this interview?

Cook: Yes.

Langer: And can you please state your full name?

Cook: Deryck John Cook

Langer: And when and where were you born?

Cook: I was born in Exton, in a village in England in 1938.

Langer: And what part of England is Exton in?

Cook: It's one hundred miles north of London, directly north really. And uh, it's in the smallest county which is called Rutland between Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire and um, just a small, small village.

Langer: What were your parents' names?

Cook: My father was named Tom, and my mother was named Daisy.

Langer: And what did they do for a living?

Cook: Um, my father was a carpenter journeyman, which meant that he was a qualified person that traveled for work. And he came to Exton and was employed by the Earl of Gainsborough Estates to do all sorts of board work around on the estates. My mother, [he was from Lincolnshire] [Referring to his father]. My mother was in the village of Exton, she may have been born there, but she wasn't far away. And she came to live in Exton with her aunt when her mother died at age fifteen. She was fifteen when she came to live with the aunt to help with the store and look after her as she got older, and in that store, we had, a post office. Actually, the post office came after I was there. Because that aunt fell down and broke her hip, my mother went to live with her and stay with her working there then

eventually married my father. And we had a separate house and we had to go and live in the business eventually.

Langer: And did you have any siblings?

Cook: No.

Langer: So, tell me a little bit about your neighborhood. What was Exton like?

Cook: It was an old stone village. Five hundred people, there were a few rental houses, but a lot of the houses were tied and owned by the Earl and most people in those houses would work for the Earl.

Langer: And was there a church in the town? Or?

Cook: Just a small, town, village, so it has one very large and old church, which is the Church of England. And um which we were that faith. And then in the big hall where the Earl lived, eventually his family became Roman Catholic because they married into Roman Catholicism. And he had a chapel within the house, so the village people were allowed to go into the grounds on Sunday to do their church things.

Langer: That's fascinating. So, you were only a year old when war started in Europe. Did you have a sense for how war was affecting your family when you were a young child?

Cook: Um yes, but I was young and when initially the impression was that the uncles and aunts were gone, and they went into the forces and other things, and they came back in uniform, and it was all a bit strange I remembering. Um, that was

really the only immediate effect except that the government put ration, ration books out. So, everyone had to have a ration book and a coupon to get food and we live in the shop, so we saw these people come and go and otherwise village life was fairly normal. Until later on, and yeah.

Langer: So how did your family get news, how did they find out about what was going on with the war?

Cook: Radio. Newspapers. That was it.

Langer: What were some of your earliest memories of bombing raids? You mentioned this in your memoir.

Cook: Um, we didn't have bombing raids where we were. We were surrounded by airfields and um some of them were bomber some of them were fighter, but the Germans when they came into bomb, they came to bomb either where the blitzkrieg came, they actually bombed the cities, but prior to that they were doing strategic bombing. Which is bombing these airfields to try to get the airplanes parked outside on the ground and destroy them while they were sitting on the ground. Bombing was, as I said, was really just the occasional, it wasn't bombing deliberately where we were it was unloading bombs because they didn't get to where they were going, the Germans.

Langer: Do you ever remember feeling the house shake or anything like that from the bombs?

Cook: Oh yes, we, our house was a stone house in the village, the walls were probably eight inches thick, so it was almost like a shelter in a way. But, on occasion we

could the bump, bump. And on one occasion, particularly, the house did shake and I remember the clock moved on the wall and the pots were rattling in the corner cupboard.

Langer: Must have been frightening.

Cook: I don't know if I realized what was going on.

Langer: Do you remember seeing men in uniform coming into the village?

Cook: Yes, yes apart from the residents who came back and forth when they had leave.

Um there was a mass influx of troops, American in fact. And um, because the Earl had gone with his mother to America for safety, the big house was in the village. Exton Hall it was called. The Americans took over the house, the grounds, everything, and they were there for a few months. Not for so long, but just a few months. And then they all went off to Europe.

Langer: So, um, what do you remember about those American troops? Um, any special memories of how they were?

Cook: They were, they were mainly good people. I think both the Black ones, the troops, and the white ones, from all over the continent, from all over the states, were particularly good to the kids. They did things to entertain them, they showed them films, they adopted them as if they were big brothers. And in fact, um, I had a big brother called Eddie Scaris, came from Chicago. And he would come and visit and bring ice cream and thing. Cause the troops, the troops had all this stuff that we never saw. And then he had a girlfriend in Chicago too called Margo. And she would put a package together from time to time and send it over to me. So that

was a good, that was a good time. He got back after the war and found out that he had already sent me a photograph. And I got a photograph here I'll show you. And um, I think, the other thing was that us kids, we sort of taunted him a bit. The troops would give us kids rides in the jeeps and all this sort of stuff. And so that was fine. They liked to go to the pub a lot, they liked to chase the girls a lot. There was catchphrases where the American, the kids got the hang of saying things like: "Got any gum chum?" and they'd say, "You got a sister mister?" [laughs]. So, um there was quite a lot of interaction that went on. And there were good times in the village hall so.

Langer: Can you tell me a bit about your education? Where did you go to school?

Cook: I went to school in the village to begin with and the system in England was at eleven years of age. Actually, it's two exams and then an interview to decide which secondary education you would get and the majority of children, boys and girls, would go on to a secondary school, secondary modern school I think it's called now. And the people that got through the exam and there's about fifteen in a year at the boy's school. There was a public school in the next town. Public school being what you call a private school, and our county didn't have a school at that level. So, it paid for people like me, that managed to get through the exams, to go to that school. And then I stayed there until I was eighteen and then I went to London University. And did my time there. So, I was one of the lucky ones, I guess.

Langer: So, when you were a young kid still in the village school, what information do you remember learning about the war?

Cook: We had posters and cartoons, things, things to make us aware of it. Then there was the “loose lips”<sup>1</sup> and all these things put out in the war as propaganda. Um, we had, we were provided through the school with vitamins and cocoa and rosehip syrup, different natural things to keep us healthy. We were regularly seen by the visiting nurse, Nitty Nora we called he. She was looking for lice. And I remember when I was in school, I also had a day when the nurse decided I had some little spots around my mouth and she put all sorts of, well not all sorts of, but a whole lot of purple, bright purple stuff on my face. So, and I went home at the end of the day, my mother saw me come in and said: “What’s happened to you!” She really, really was quite upset and she scrubbed it off of me fast as she could. Put some other cream on, so that was one of the things the nurse did. Um, what else did we get... Well, a dentist would come, and he would have a pull along caravan behind his vehicle. And he would park it on the village green, and then we would go from the school into the caravan once in six months, maybe once in three months. But he went around all the villages doing that. So that, that was a pretty good [undecipherable 12:35]. But we had our gas masks, and we were told to be careful with lights, furnaces, we weren’t able to have drawn curtains after dark, they had to be tightly drawn, closed. So, no lights showed, no matter where air raid wardens go round the village after dark, they saw a glimpse

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<sup>1</sup> “Loose Lips Might Sink Ships” was a 1941 American propaganda poster campaign created by Seymour R. Golf. According to Nabb Research Center, the British favored the phrase “Careless Talk Costs Lives.” <https://libapps.salisbury.edu/nabb-online/exhibits/show/propaganda/slogans/loose-lips-might-sink-ships>

of a light, they would knock on the door. You know you were contravening the rules. So that was a laugh I guess really, I mean we knew, they were all members of the village. They weren't you know professional people sent in, they were all volunteers, but our home guard<sup>2</sup> or air raid warden, or something like that.

Langer: So, tell me if you remember what did that gas mask look like that you were given?

Cook: Well, there were different ones, the kids, the little kids, like I was um, I'm not sure but I must have had a baby one too, 'cause you had them with, like a cradle, where you know the child would lay in it you would button it up and then they went on from, the ones that just fitted over your head with straps. It had like a, a um, some sort of material in a nose piece a bit like Goofy. And that was to prevent the gas from getting into your... And then they went on to adult ones which the same principle but different um, just ordinary black. With the plastic glass in the middle. Everyone had one of those.

Langer: The kids one you mention was Goofy. What colours was it?

Cook: Yeah, yeah bright colours. I think I had one with red and green, I think. But [undecipherable 14:24] memory fails me exactly.

Langer: Um so, you talked a little bit before about rationing. But was it easy for your family to get enough to eat?

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the British Home Guard, see: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-dads-army>

Cook: We, again, we I probably was fortunate because we bake the bread, we had the groceries, and we rationed out the goods to the people depending on how many coupons they had in the ration book. Two ounces of cheese, two ounces of butter, and more quantities. But in the village um, and I mentioned before, we were fortunate in many ways. One of them was also that we would be able to catch meat in the form of rabbits and hares, pigeons, rooks, and they were all folded into the, into the diet. Um and also, like eggs, eggs were okay because most people had hens of their own. Um, and if they didn't the farmers, instead of sending some of the eggs to the government or the market, or wherever they went, they would have to make some sort of test on them or declare them unsuitable, didn't meet the class. And so those were available to the people around the village. We got plenty of milk from the farm, and um, all in all we did well. But I think the people in the cities didn't have gardens and didn't have fresh vegetables, and that stuff, it was much tougher for them.

Langer: So, what do you remember about growing food, did your family have its own garden?

Cook: Yes, we would grow regular vegetables, but in the season potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, beans, carrots, um, all the regular green grocery products we would get.

Langer: And you talked about how the men of the village would trap these animals. Do you remember how they did it, how would they trap rabbits?

Cook: Yes, they would have snares, which would be above the ground. It was a wire ring, like a slight slip knot. So, they would set it up on a stick, and then when the rabbit came along and hopped, they hop always on the same path where they go, so you know where to set this thing up. So, as it, as it jumps through it, it hangs itself basically. Like it chokes itself and its dead. Um, that's, they would do it on a bigger scale. Cause rabbits tend to live in a big group called a warren. And if they find, they were a real nuisance and they want to do more, what they do is they would go around the warren and set up nets over the hole cause they had many holes. And then they would have an animal called a ferret, and they're on a string, and push them down the holes, the various holes. They go in and that scares the rabbits, and the rabbits try to run away and as they come out of the hole, they dive into the net. And then have to be silenced, shall I say. It was, it wasn't brutal, but it was necessary I guess, and I don't think we were soft hearted in those days as we are today about animals.

Langer: So, you mentioned in your memoir how rabbits and pigeons were different in the eyes of the law from pheasants and hares. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Cook: Yeah, it tended to be something to do with royalty, back when royalty had more of the land and um and the hare was, was a much bigger animal than the rabbit was considered in law, you say, it was considered to be game. And that means that it was really the property of the landowner and not the tenant. And so, the tenant could take the rabbits, but he couldn't take the hares or the pheasants. And um it was just, but, but they were always tempting and there was quite a lot of

poaching that went on and, but they were really prison time and fines and crimes yeah.

Langer: So, since your family owned a shop in the village, what do you remember about people bringing their ration cards to the shop? How did that transaction work?

Cook: Well, they had a book, I'll show you the cover of one here. And um it was little marked out squares or whatever lines and my mother or aunt would take the book and cut down or across and take the coupon, and they would have to store that. And then they would send it off to the ministry, the food ministry. Um or through their wholesale, I think it went to the food ministry. And then they would approve supplies for the next two weeks, and sometimes we'd would order, I think, Friday or Saturday, and it would be delivered from the wholesale on a Tuesday. And we always were keen to see what it was, we didn't necessarily get what we ordered. Some weeks we'd get it sometimes we'd get more sometimes we wouldn't. It was a bit, whatever was available you know, you got a quantity of it. But distribution was, was pretty good. I remember that. But the other, I said also that there was some local trading done at the local level, because people have relatives somewhere, and relatives somewhere else, they had things that we didn't have and vice-versa. So, the lady would come to the store with a shopping basket with a layer at the bottom with stuff in it. And then when nobody's looking, bring it out and pass it on and we would put it in the store or other people would be there and to meet them and the trading would go on. Black market stuff, but very, very minor in a way.

Langer: So, you talked as well in your memoir about the role a pig would play in your family, would you tell me a little bit about that?

Cook: That was the centerpiece really of the family as much as it provided a lot of food every year. People would buy, they had a pig sty in the backyard, and which was just a shed and a little run. And people would you know it was a fence about this high, so people would go and look at it and watch it grow and give it scraps and potatoes that weren't up to the mark and feed it. And it would by about September or October it would grow from this big (hands close) to this big (hands wide) and so then, the guy in the village, every village was self-sufficient really, who was the pig killer, and he had a stun gun and a sharp knife, and he would, we would book him for a Saturday morning and we would get a bale of straw so that after the pig was stunned and the throat slit, he would fall over onto the straw. He would light the straw and that would burn the hair off it. Then after that we would clean it all up and the internal stuff and take that. Um but the family plus the relatives and friends would set about preparing it for storage and eating and whatever. So, the aunts, the uncles, friends would come around and they'd make it into various pieces and bigger pieces like the ribs or the sides they would put them in a shallow trough which was full of salt. And they keep going over with season and keep adding it and it was cured and then you could take it right through the winter and eat it through the winter so it gave a big feast immediately and they um, stored it till it would go out. Again, that was all really outside the rationing things, again, city people wouldn't have that privilege.

Langer: So, um, you mention that in your memoir, that in addition to all this food you could use other parts of the pig and talked a little bit about how pig's bladder was really, tell me about that.

Cook: Well, pig's bladder is not round but its quite about this size (hands about 10 inches apart). We would get a bike pump and pump it up through the neck, and then when it was hard, we would tie it down. And then we would kick it around and play ball with it. Till someone trot on it or it burst or something. That was a bit of fun and you know the saying in the village or in the country was: "Use everything the pig has except its squeal," (laughs). So, it was good old-fashioned country people we were.

Langer: So, in addition to your soccer ball, or football, what other kinds of toys do you remember playing with as a child?

Cook: They were all second hand and not many of them. They were all hand me downs from within the border valley, or sometimes within the village you could get stuff. It was all used stuff um, that was a problem, but we got by and um, we got our little three wheelers and then a two-wheeler and we did what we could. But other toys you know you could make a lot of things out from wood. We made sledges or toboggans out from wood, so we spent a lot of the winter on those. Yeah, it was, we had old games, snakes and ladders and all those table games.

Langer: Do you remember one year getting a special puzzle?

Cook: Oh (smiles) yeah. From, as well as the Eddie Scaris's wife, not wife, girlfriend Margo sent us stuff. We had another source from Canada that, grandma that gone

to Canada with two or three other children in her thirties. Settled around Hamilton in Ontario. And they were aware of the plight, so they would send frequently Canadian sweaters and different things and once they sent a jig-saw puzzle and they were always good to do. And you don't often get a new one, so it came new and pristine. And um, we use it a lot and one day for some reason there was a piece missing, and there was a little bit of hell to pay then because we were careless kids.

Langer: I can imagine. Um, so what else did your family do for fun? What are some of the activities and around the village especially around the holidays?

Cook: Um, we would, generally, we would walk weekends around, we'd go to church and do that. In the village hall, there would be, more for the adults, there would be whist drives and answers and stuff. And I think I started going to whist drives when I was about nine, or eight or nine. Which was more towards the end of the war. They had a lot of, um the athletes they did a pantomime, the ladies and some of the men and stuff. The garden, the garden was always had something doing, they had flower and event shows and it was very much self-contained really. And that was made.

Langer: And what is a whist drive, do you play cards?

Cook: Yeah. Yes, it's a game called whist. Its um, I don't know that its like bridge or probably not so complicated. But it was a card game yeah.

Langer: So, um, can you tell me a little bit about hosting evacuees from London and Coventry?

Cook: Yes, yes! We, in our village we had quite a few evacuees from both those places and others and we, because I was a, we were just, my father, my mother and me in a three-bedroom house we were designated a place for evacuees. Fortunately, we got three that we knew through early friendships from Coventry. (to himself: "three, there's Robert" paused for thinking). There were three from Coventry, and um they weren't all runners. But one was, Robert, Tony was a runner and he stayed with us and the other two and they in fact, had just escaped Coventry on the night of a big raid and as they were coming to bring the kids to us that night the place was all in flames, so it was a bit of an experience for them. So that's that, they were older than I was, so I'd run around with them, and I didn't get pushed into the fireplace but I got tripped and fell in and I had marks on my arm here, there from it. But yeah, it was good fun but one of them, Tony, his father was an air raid warden and he got killed one night on some raids, so that was upsetting.

Langer: And um, did his, was his mother able to come out at that point or did he have to still stay with you?

Cook: Oh, he stayed with us, yes, yes. I don't know, I mean those days people didn't have cars and stuff, but only businesspeople and priests or parsons, um businesspeople would have a vehicle. Otherwise, you, there was a bus, or a taxi and Coventry was about forty or fifty miles away, so yeah, there was no service at all in the village so. Yeah, it was tough.

Langer: How long did the children stay with you?

Cook: Until, until the Germans stopped bombing the cities, I think it was about probably in '44 probably. That's when all the Americans came. (laughs).

Langer: So, so what were some of the roles you remember the adults playing on the home front?

Cook: Um, apart from the being the air raid wardens, they were spotters for the airplanes and ("anything else they might be doing" thinking) home guard, I think I said that. Yeah, they would do, be good citizens certainly. And report anything they thought was untoward. And yeah, I think that's the role they played.

Langer: And what about, you mentioned in your memoir, your Aunt Joan?

Cook: Yes, she, this house that we lived in, the family house, you know two or three generations floating around in there. And she was a young girl, became a hairdresser before it all happened. She was diverted from her job to go into a heavy munitions' factory at a town away, so she had to go and live there and um, she was working on, on heavy machine work. That, I remember her being very upset by that, it was not a sort of environment or life, and she aged in that time, yeah.

Langer: And what about you father? What role did he play in the home guard?

Cook: I don't know what rank he was, I can't remember but it was, I don't know if you have ever seen an English program called Dad's Army, but, it's a program about the, but it's spoofed you know so we always tease him that's how it was. You know, they were fooling about, they weren't doing anything useful and things like that. But they were there, they still have to go, and train and shots fire and they

used to say that they were training, its competitive shooting, and some of them would pass the bullet round, the best shots and be transferred to the coast. So immediately his performance dropped right off. (Laughs and smiles).

Langer, And, and your mother, you mentioned that she had a role as well in the village women's institute.

Cook: Yes, she was president of the women's institute for quite a few years. And so, she and a lot of friends and relatives did good work through that with fruit picking in the fields and preparing jam and then fruit and all that stuff so, domestic stuff. And they did knitting to send to the troops and other, other needle work and things like that yeah. And as well as organizing things. You know, if there was a need to have a team of people who distribute something, you know everybody would kick in and help on that. I remember that.

Langer: So, tell me about riding your bicycle around, you mentioned one particular interesting thing that happened with your bicycle in your memoir.

Cook: Yeah, I was a little older, well I wasn't very old, I could ride a two-wheeler bike. And my father was able to persuade somebody to sell him a little red bike about this tall (hand at his chest) and I was absolutely excited so when that came. And I used to get everywhere on it, everybody went everywhere on the bikes and uh so in the summer evenings we would bike out to family or other, more people than that. There weren't cars all over the place, you could just go where you want. And we'd go to the airfields and see the airplanes getting ready for takeoff and one particular time, I think it's the one you're thinking about, we went about five

miles and there was word going around that there was going to be a parachute jumping session there, practice. So, we went, and we got there, and we stood on the edge of the field and there was a railway line right by it and the soldiers started, started coming down like confetti and the parachutes. And one of them was coming down, right on the railway line. And there were telephone wires alongside the railway, and he was strung up in those wires for quite a while. And they were, they were so young, and so some of them were tearful with the stress. And um, that was, that was not a good thing to witness.

Langer: Um, so you, before we kinda move toward the end of the war, I wanted to revisit one thing about the American soldiers. You mentioned that they kind of showed up at the end of 1943ish—

Cook: Yes

Langer: Is that right? And What differences did you notice between the American soldiers' uniforms and their British counterparts?

Cook: Well, the British uniforms were khaki, not the same colour quite as the Americans. They were like hairy material, thick hairy material. Probably more durable and probably nicer when its cold weather. But the Americans they were round, they had money. They had smart uniforms, they all looked like officers to be honest. They had the nice badges; I did have some of those badges at one time, but I don't know where they are anymore. But yes, they were smooth, and well-groomed and whatever, they, they were, I think it impressed some of the ladies.

Langer: And um, and when was it that they all started to go, that they left?

Cook: Well for several months before D-day, which was June the sixth, they congregated into England. And they brought lots of (undecipherable) and stuff. And a lot of the, cause it was, a lot of the vehicles, mainly vehicles but not the big stuff—the big equipment. But they were parked along the country roads, up tightly to the edge row and trees over, so that when the German (not sure) plane came over, they'd would not, hopefully be able to see them. And so, when they were moving on toward D-day, two-three months before D-day I guess everything moved down to the South. And they, they left. They um, yeah, they made good visitors in lots of ways.

Langer: So, toward the end of the war, you had mentioned that you learned about an uncle who was killed, can you tell me about that?

Cook: 1944, yes. I think it was the twenty-second of November, we had telegrams from other people that had been killed during the war but this particular one came, and I guess we were thinking that now it was getting near, and it would be all right. And then the telegram came and um, I remember, and I was there, and my mother was there, and my old aunt was there, his wife was there, she was maybe twenty-two or twenty something, and the baby, and the baby was just young. So that was, it upset the family a lot. It really did.

Langer: What was his name?

Cook: Called Chip, but his name was Charles. Charles Fredrick.

Langer: So how did you, ultimately, how did you find out about the end of the war in Europe, how did that news come to you?

Cook: Um, it would be on the radio first, I'm sure. And then it would be in the papers the next day and so on. And um, so everybody was sort of relieved and jovial talking to one another about it. And um, in the village, it was time to celebrate. And so, they organized, a sort of party, a get together in the pub and around the pub. And um, I wasn't old enough to go but I did watch from a bedroom window. And um, people were getting a little more, a little tipsy, more excited there and they were serving the kids, fifteen-year-old boys' beer. And of course, they soon could not handle it, so they were falling all over and people and boys that I, that I looked up to were in no shape for it, I was a little bit disappointed about that I remember. You get over it and then it was only small.

Langer: I guess that your sense of what was going on was probably a little different from theirs.

Cook: Yes

Langer: 'Cause they were closer to that age where they might have to serve.

Cook: Yes, yes. Yes, that would be true.

Langer: Um, did you have a sense for, so the war ended for Europe, did you have a sense for it continuing in the Pacific? And ultimately, the dropping of the atomic bombs, did that, did that register?

Cook: Um, yes, I knew a little bit about it, but I didn't know, I learned a lot since and I'm not sure about how much I knew then. But no, it was a big relief it was out of Europe and the Japanese deserved what you got, you know. That was a different situation in some respects than the Germany situation. You know, the

aggravation, the feeling towards them was different. ‘Cause we didn’t see some of the people return from over there until much later.

Langer: And um, since the war was basically all you had ever known, how did the end of the war change your life?

Cook: Regularly we were able to get more and different food, a bit like Covid, the places started to open up and you could go to the Cinema more easily, you can travel more easily, its uh, it’s a lightening of attitudes and a lightening of the way people lived. They weren’t you know; they weren’t under threat or fear the way they had been previously.

Langer: What, what were your hopes and dreams for the future coming out of the war as a young teenager?

Cook: Well, um, first of all to get the better education, the best education you could so work hard at school, and it was just a small village school, so it all happened from there, so I was grateful for that. It was not until later much later that I thought about earning a living and making a living doing anything. I guess because in the village it was sort of a practical life in a way, you are on a farm, you work on the equipment, so I became an engineer. And I never had thought about, mother wanted me to be auctioneer, but I never went that way. (laughs).

Langer: So, um, did you remember learning at all the Germans persecution of civilians and the murder of the Jewish people?

Cook: No, I didn’t know about that. I didn’t know it when I didn’t know it but yes, I did know obviously eventually, but it would be probably towards teenage or

something like that. It wasn't talked about a lot, people a lot of the troops who came back from the war never ever talked about it. Never talked to their families, they didn't know what they did or where they went. It was so awful and um I think that that was a situation that remained for a long time. My wife's father was over in Europe for more than five years. And he never talked to the family about it at all. He came home and he um Ann, Ann's my wife's name, she hadn't seen in a while, and she screamed and said, "take that man away!" Which I don't suppose helped him any and, but you know she hadn't seen him in quite a while. She lived with her mother and grandma, and this was some intruder who had just arrived. But um, that's yeah.

Langer: I've heard other stories like that when people and just how hard that is on the returning soldier but there's nothing that they could have done.

Cook: No, no. it was a very delicate time for relationships.

Langer: So how did your community commemorate the war? Was there a sense of commemoration?

Cook: Well, there weren't as many killed as there were in the first World War, the first World War they put up buildings and a special garden where there was a stone monument in there with some of the names. Um, in our church what they did was just to put a plaque on the wall behind the lectern and had the names of the people who were on there. My uncle was one and another Charles from the next-door house he got killed somewhere. And there would have to be seven or eight so and

some of them I don't remember now. Yeah, out of the various families in the village.

Langer: So how did you eventually come to emigrate to the United States?

Cook: I, after I left university, I took a job in a place called Peterborough, which is about twenty-five miles from Exton. And uh, I worked there and then I left there for a few years then I came back again and then they, when the electronics were starting to be introduced more and more into engine control, that company which was Massey Ferguson<sup>3</sup>, formed a development team in Toronto. And so, I was asked if I would like to come across to be part of that team representing the engine company. So, we did, and we had brought three children with us. And then after three years, the same group offered me a job in Detroit, a different, better job, so we moved to Detroit and two years later we moved to Georgia and we have been here ever since, I've been retired and I worked for Caterpillar ultimately, yeah so it was just the invitation to come over and I don't know that we would do the same again, but we enjoyed it. And it's been different and um, and the, what am I going to say now? (pauses) I can't remember what it is, nothing of consequence obviously.

Langer: What were, so what year was this then when you came to Toronto and the United—

Cook: We came, we came to Canada, yeah Toronto in January of 1982. And then we stayed there for three years, Detroit for two years, so we have been in Georgia a

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.masseyferguson.com/en\\_us/discover-mf/history.html](https://www.masseyferguson.com/en_us/discover-mf/history.html)

long, long time. But we've been living in different places and ultimately Caterpillar bought our company, and obviously getting near to retirement, but they allowed me to have a home office rather than move us all to, well the kids had gone, but move us to Peoria which was not a pleasant thought.

Langer: How old were your kids when you moved to Canada?

Cook: Yeah, well the oldest one was a girl, sixteen, the next one fourteen, a boy, very difficult to settle, missed his football. And other things, but he's done well since he's been here, he's an attorney now, and the third one, she's a girl and my older one stayed in Canada when we left, she had a boyfriend that she stayed and married, been married like twenty-five years, twenty- thirty years, and she stayed over there. The two, other two came down and one of them is an in-house attorney at SunTrust bank and the younger one is the defects director for Carroll County. So um, yeah, I'm pleased with what they have done.

Langer: So, what did you notice as the biggest differences between England, and Canada, and then the United States?

Cook: We found Canada to be a bit of a halfway house, you could still get a fair amount of British type stuff, the manufacturers of tea and all sorts of grocery type products, cookies particularly. And they would be dealing with Canada because it was part of the empire, and it was preferred terms and stuff. But when we came to Detroit, it was very different, um, we found that the people were probably not as kind in some respects as the Canadians and the Canadians, well the Americans too, were always interested they talked to us to hear our accent, yeah so some

would immediately stop talking but other ones get into it you know. But um, again when we came down to the South particularly, that was very different, the food stuffs, the restaurants, you know the things that we used to eat, we still eat at home ‘cause we make sure we can do a version of what we used to have. Uh, with the beats and stuff but yeah, it was very different down here, and uh, there was quite a lot of rivalry we detected between the Southerners and the Northerners. And we often been told, not us, the Brits had a bit of an advantage, the Northerners that come down here and settle are often told perhaps they should seventy-five or eighty-five way back (laughs). They know where it is, well that's small talk and not really considered serious. I'm talking too much (smiles).

Langer: No, no that's okay that's okay, um so, the reflecting on your life, how do you think that World War Two and its aftermath affected your experience, how did that, did it change any trajectory you imagine? How did that affect your life?

Cook: Well, the war was officially behind by the time I started thinking constructive, you know about doing something proper, about doing something. And so, uh, I won't say it, well probably it made me more appreciative of what you don't have or the other way around. And um, some of the experiences of the sadder times and then immediately after the war, well immediately after the war I went down to London, joined the university in fifty something, the early fifties. Such a tremendous amount of damage still existed in London at that time. And I used to go across London, from one side to the other to get to university and um, you know there were lots of tumbled down buildings bomb sites whatever, it's been cleaned up a lot in the past forty years, thirty years whatever. But it was, it was

obvious and there were many people who talk about how they went into the shelters, into the underground to get themselves safe and things that happened. So, it must have had some effect on people, saying be more cautious and you know more careful with your money and everything. You became, I do remember that sort of transition of feeling where you become more aware of what you have, and you don't go and uh be extravagant in any way.

Langer: Why do you think it is important for students to learn about the history of World War Two and the Holocaust and just history in general?

Cook: Well, if you don't remember it and learn it, then things happen again and today with some of the things that do go on, I mean it's almost like the population is out of control and that's worrying.

Langer: And um, you know you talked a little bit about appreciation you know for what you have and. What do you hope that people will take away from learning about your childhood you know um and your family's story?

Cook: Well, I hope they won't be bored. And uh, and some of the other little things I should, I probably forgot to throw in asides. And um, lighten the, lighten the discussion and if they can get something from the appreciation of that things have been bad and you need to look after what you have and be serious about life and not just rebellious about it. I mean the state that we are in here with the two-party system. And honestly, I see that as awful.

Langer: Are you still a UK citizen or did the become a US citizen?

Cook: Well, we were UK and then we became Canadian and then we ultimately, well not ultimately, but after we had been here about three to five years, we made the change and then the three children, well Caroline didn't because she stayed in Canada, she's a Canadian. But the other two became American citizens and very proud of it. And the grandsons they are, they're born American boys.

Langer: So, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to share?

Cook: Well, let me find (pulls out stack of papers) well I added stuff on here. (pause) Yeah, we didn't talk about prisoners of war or anything. But the prisons that we had, prison camps, for the prisoners of war, right next to the village and um, not next, but very few miles away. And then we had a place for displaced persons even closer. And then the Italian prisoners of war were in a village, and they seem to be privileged and they were allowed to live in some prefabricated bungalows, ranch style houses. They worked on the farms, they worked in the village doing manual work, they were very skillful at both the Germans and the Italians made simple wooden toys for the children and stuff, so there was no real aggro, you know, there was no feelings towards them in everyday life. I mean some of them married ultimately girls from the village. Um, both German and Italian prisoners, it was you know, just the war was caught up, you know the people. A lot of the Germans didn't want to fight.

Langer: And did those who married the village women, did they end up staying in England or did they go back to Germany?

Cook: Um, some English guys brought some German ladies back, and they lived in our village. But um mostly they went where their ladies wanted to be, so that mean they were staying. But one English guy, brought a German wife back and they lived in the village and became part.

Langer: This, it reminds me of something, when you talked about the American soldiers, you mentioned that you saw white soldiers and you also saw Black soldiers. Do you remember did they interact with the villagers the same way and did they interact with each other?

Cook: Um, I was young then. But you know I hear the folks talking, when you're a kid you're in a room full of relatives and parents and stuff and they are loose lipped, and you hear things that you perhaps shouldn't hear and there was some concern but um about all of them. But we weren't prejudice in any way against Black people because we had some in England. And one was a comedian and a star, and everyone thought he was wonderful. And that sort of went, fed down and they weren't regarded as you know the bad guys. But they, the American forces certainly tried to keep the separation going and wouldn't let them go to the village dance and stuff like that the whites were going to. They were being persecuted a little bit; they were kept separate by the forces. Um but um, there weren't that many of them where we were, but the ones we were really involved with were the white ones. Yeah.

Langer: Yeah, so you just told me about the prisoners of war, were there any other things to talk about that you—

Cook: (looks down at papers) yeah, I just wrote it before I came, and I did that already.

Yeah, we had a saying, I'm sure you heard it, which I didn't know about when I was little but um it says that the American troops, it would be a wild saying now a days, they were overpaid, oversexed, and over here. That'd be real, that that might be what I'm thinking of. Committing to it. Oh yeah, I mentioned this, it might be of interest. When the massive bombing raid on Coventry, it was flattened, the Cathedral was smashed and they, that needn't have happened because just before that and I have heard this since. A German submarine off the coast of America I think it got stranded or slightly sunk, they found that on submarine a unit, which they call the enigma unit. And they brought it back to England and it went to a place called Bletchley Park<sup>4</sup> you have probably seen the movie, they eventually cracked that code, and they cracked it just before that raid happened on Coventry. And Churchill um, the government I guess, the forces decided that they wouldn't play their hand and protect Coventry and the people there and let the bombing raid take place. Because they had other bigger things and didn't want Germans to know that they had already cracked it. So, the people sacrificed, that was a bit much I thought.

Langer: When did that come out, when was that made public, that information? Years later or right after the war?

Cook: Oh uh, well afterwards, it was secret for a long time. Blexley was actually like a place that there was something going on strange in there you don't know what it's

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Bletchley Park and the codebreaking efforts during World War II, see <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/>

all about. And a lot of ladies were involved in that. (Looks back at papers) I mentioned that, yeah, I remember the troops coming back from the various theatres of war, that took quite a while. And everything was on rationing. Furniture was on rationing. Gasoline was red coloured [undecipherable 1:02:45]. That's the ration book. (Holds up the picture of a ration book).

Langer: Are you getting that?

Cameraman (off screen): Yeah, I am, let me zoom on out here. One second. (Camera zooms in on ration book) Got it.

Cook: Oh um, it's the same thing again, probably a better one. (Holds up another image of ration book. This time a colour copy).

Cameraman: (zooms in on coloured ration book) Wonderful, thank you.

Cook: And that's Eddie Scaris (holds up photograph).

Cameraman: Got it, thank you.

Cook: It was a shame, we came in eighty-two, he should have still been around, but I don't think we had all the computer access back then that you could do your own searching and but anyways. Some of the people we used to think about have fallen by the wayside after all these years.

Langer: Well, thank you so much for speaking with me today and sharing your story for the legacy series. I really appreciate it. And thanks again for your time.

Cook: Any chance you can get me a copy of it?

Langer: Oh—

(Cuts off).