

William Xavier Cook

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Johnson: [00:00:00] So I'm going to ask a series of questions. I'm going to go over different groups. And then at the end, I'm going to circle around and see if we miss anything.

Cook: [00:00:11] All right.

Johnson: [00:00:12] So I want to start off by asking a little bit about your background. When and where were you born?

Cook: [00:00:17] I was born here in Chicago on the South Side.

Johnson: [00:00:22] Yeah. What was it like growing up in Chicago?

Cook: [00:00:26] Well, growing up in Chicago in the fifties was pretty uneventful.

Johnson: [00:00:32] Yeah.

Cook: [00:00:34] I went to Sherwood Public School, which is about 56[th St.] And Wells, and the neighborhoods were very stable.

Johnson: [00:00:48] Yeah.

Cook: [00:00:52] Yeah and somewhat integrated.

Johnson: [00:00:54] Yeah.

Cook: [00:00:55] And then they built the Dan Ryan Expressway.

Johnson: [00:00:58] Yeah.

Cook: [00:00:59] Right in the middle of the Black neighborhood, which kind of displaced everyone. And our family moved further south into Englewood district. Well, pretty much little bit south of the Englewood district.

Johnson: [00:01:17] Yeah.

Cook: [00:01:18] Yeah.

Johnson: [00:01:20] And do you do you have any siblings?

Cook: [00:01:23] I have four sisters who have preceded me in life. And. I was the only boy and. My family is much older and pretty much deceased now.

Johnson: [00:01:42] Yeah. Yeah. And are you married?

Cook: [00:01:46] Yes, I am.

Johnson: [00:01:47] Yeah. Do you have any children?

Cook: [00:01:48] I have one son. And he's 35 years old. Yeah, yeah.

Johnson: [00:01:57] That's good. Let's see. And did anyone else in your family serve in the military?

Cook: [00:02:02] My grandfather served in World War One.

Johnson: [00:02:08] Yeah.

Cook: [00:02:09] And my uncles, my two uncles, my father's two brothers served in Korea.

Johnson: [00:02:16] That's nice. That's cool. Let's see. And do you remember where the. Where you went to primary school?

Cook: [00:02:26] Sure. Yeah, sure, sure.

Johnson: [00:02:28] Did you play any sports or were you involved in any clubs there?

Cook: [00:02:31] No, Dad. Sherwood was pretty much elementary grades one through eight.

Johnson: [00:02:38] Yeah.

Cook: [00:02:38] And we didn't have any teams or anything like that.

Johnson: [00:02:43] Yeah.

Cook: [00:02:44] So I didn't play any sports until I get to high school.

Johnson: [00:02:50] Yeah. And even.

Cook: [00:02:52] Then I didn't make the.

Johnson: [00:02:54] Team.

Cook: [00:02:54] Yeah, I did make the wrestling team for a short period of time, but my main interest was music.

Johnson: [00:03:03] Yeah.

Cook: [00:03:03] So I did dabble around with musical instruments in the high school band.

Johnson: [00:03:12] Yeah.

Cook: [00:03:14] That kind of.

Johnson: [00:03:15] Yeah. You mentioned, I think you mentioned that you really like jazz music.

Cook: [00:03:20] Yeah, because of my father and my uncles, they were all from the Be Bop there.

Johnson: [00:03:24] Yeah.

Cook: [00:03:24] So I grew up listening to nothing but jazz. Yeah, primarily unless I had my own little transistor radio where I would listen to the local radio stations like WVON.

Johnson: [00:03:38] Yeah.

Cook: [00:03:38] And things like that.

Johnson: [00:03:40] Yeah. Do you play any instruments?

Cook: [00:03:42] No, I. I lost interest after a while. And I tried to take it up again. But without supervision, you don't have the discipline to practice and things like that.

Johnson: [00:03:58] So yeah, that is. And when you decided to join the Army, or the Marines did like was there any other things that you thought about doing or was. Were you dead set on the--?

Cook: [00:04:11] No, I was dead set on joining the Marine Corps. I was I after I got out of high school, I became 18 for the draft and I was on the fast track to probably get drafted by the Army. But I wanted to join the Marine Corps because to me, that was my best chance of going to Vietnam.

Johnson: [00:04:37] Yeah.

Cook: [00:04:38] And. The Marine Corps was the best, and I wanted to be the best.

Johnson: [00:04:48] Yeah! Yeah. So let's see. And you mentioned a little bit about enlistment. You mentioned that at the time of your enlistment, you saw individuals on TV burning American flags and draft cards. How did you feel about that?

Cook: [00:05:06] It broke my heart, you know, to see the American flag being burned, you know, people protesting the war. Although, you know, I was seventeen at the time. I didn't, I wasn't political or nothing. But I grew up believing that the United States should be respected.

Johnson: [00:05:30] And the US flag should be revered, and that if you get a draft card or you get a notice of induction into the military, it was your obligation to serve. I mean, freedom isn't free. So it broke my heart, and I just made a promise to myself that I wouldn't be one of them--

Johnson: [00:05:54] --Yeah.

Cook: [00:05:54] --To burn the flag or burn my card or refuse to be inducted into the military. So I turned eighteen during the summer of '67. I would see all of these images on television in addition to the fact that the Vietnam War was on every night in the news. Walter Cronkite would be showing the amount of casualties and people that died. I think Peter Jennings, you know, all the major news broadcasters and I would see Americans being killed.

Johnson: [00:06:34] Yeah.

Cook: [00:06:34] You know, and I'm thinking nobody kills Americans.

Johnson: [00:06:38] Yeah.

Cook: [00:06:38] So I'd have no animosity against the Vietnamese people. I didn't even know where Viet Nam was on the map. Yeah, I just saw Americans being killed.

Johnson: [00:06:48] Yeah.

Cook: [00:06:48] And I saw Americans burning draft cards and American flags and doing all other sort of sort of nefarious things. So I just said, "Well, it won't be me."

Johnson: [00:07:02] Yeah.

Cook: [00:07:02] And in the summer, after the summer of '67, I turned eighteen in the fall of '67 and in early winter, in January of '68, I enlisted in the Marine Corps, and on the last day of February, the 29th of February, 1968, I was on the fast track headed to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California.

Johnson: [00:07:33] Yeah, let's see and let's see. And what did your family and friends think about you joining the Army?

Cook: [00:07:43] Well, I was reluctant to tell my father.

Johnson: [00:07:48] Yeah.

Cook: [00:07:49] My mother had passed away when I was a little kid when I was three years old. So my father was the only person I would really have to answer to. So I was reluctant to tell him. So I didn't tell him.

Johnson: [00:08:02] Yeah.

Cook: [00:08:03] And to the night before I was to report to the induction center and, you know. I didn't think my father would be that emotional about it.

Johnson: [00:08:19] Yeah.

Cook: [00:08:19] And because up to that point, I didn't think I could get killed. Yeah, I thought. I thought I was going to go over there.

Johnson: [00:08:30] Yeah. And.

Cook: [00:08:31] You know.

Johnson: [00:08:33] Yeah.

Cook: [00:08:33] Take care of business. But I didn't think I would be, you know. But when I saw how emotional my father was, it was the first time I realized, "Whew, I can get killed."

Johnson: [00:08:46] Yeah...

Cook: [00:08:49] But he had accepted because I had already signed on the dotted line. And I told him at the last moment and everybody else pretty much accepted the fact also.

Johnson: [00:09:02] Yeah. So. And you went to you went to basic training in California?

Cook: [00:09:08] Yes.

Johnson: [00:09:09] Yes. What was that like?

Cook: [00:09:11] Oh, it was a nightmare. If you ever look at the movie *Full Metal Jacket*.

Johnson: [00:09:16] Yeah.

Cook: [00:09:17] That was my experience in boot camp.

Johnson: [00:09:21] Yeah. [Laughter]

Cook: [00:09:22] In fact, even worse.

Johnson: [00:09:22] Worse to be honest with you. But it was a wake-up call, you know, it was tough. It was demanding. It was totally out of my element.

Johnson: [00:09:36] Yeah.

Cook: [00:09:37] It was the first time I had ever been out of the state of Illinois. It was the first time I had ever been on a plane. It was the first time I had ever had to actually answer to someone. Immediately and without reservation. It was pretty brutal.

Johnson: [00:10:01] Yeah. Everything all at once.

Cook: [00:10:02] Yeah. Yeah, it was. It was pretty brutal.

Johnson: [00:10:04] Yeah. And you you mentioned, I think that you got promoted twice early on.

Cook: [00:10:10] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I applied myself.

Johnson: [00:10:16] Yeah!

Cook: [00:10:16] I mean, I got to the point where I stopped saying, "Oh, this is rough, this is tough". And just said, "Hey, you asked for it."

Johnson: [00:10:25] Yeah.

Cook: [00:10:25] You know, and now that you've asked for it, you got to, you know, stand up and do your best. So I was exceptional in training, and I was promoted to Private First Class, right? Right out of boot camp.

Johnson: [00:10:43] Yeah.

Cook: [00:10:44] And then I went to advanced infantry training and then to supply administration warehouse, which was my MOS.

Johnson: [00:10:57] Yeah.

Cook: [00:10:58] And I made lance corporal, which is E-3, so I went from E-1 which is a private to private first-class E-3, lance corporal. And then once I got to Okinawa. I applied myself and

did my job real good and I was promoted to E-4, which is corporal, which is the lowest level of a noncommissioned officer in the Marine Corps.

Johnson: [00:11:31] Yeah. Would you say that like you were probably more motivated than the other people that were with you at basic training or--

Cook: [00:11:42] Well, I don't know if I was more motivated, but I had a desire. Yeah, I might have had a stronger desire. I wanted to be able to [pause] represent my race properly. Yeah, and I also had it within me to be the best that I could be. I've always been taught, "If you're going to do something, do it to the best of your ability." So I was motivated by that mantra to do the very best no matter what. And like I said, "I wanted to be the best Marine I possibly could be", you know, and that required going out of your way to do things. And then my instructors and superiors saw something in me that they would give me assignments and duties, that they felt that, 'Oh, if I give it to Corporal Cook or Private Cook or PFC Cook, Lance Corporal, it's going to get done'.

Johnson: [00:12:55] Yeah.

Cook: [00:12:55] You know, and I didn't want to let anyone down, especially yourself, so.

Johnson: [00:13:01] Yeah. And was like, like how integrated was the training at that time. Like, you know what I mean by integration. Yeah.

Cook: [00:13:11] What you talk about regarding race?

Johnson: [00:13:12] Yeah!

Cook: [00:13:13] It wasn't that many Blacks in the Marine Corps. Okay. Because you got to realize, when Truman integrated the military, the Marine Corps were the last to actually come on board.

Johnson: [00:13:26] Yeah.

Cook: [00:13:27] And I tell people every day, I said in my entire four years in the Marine Corps, I never saluted a Black officer. They said, "Why?" I said, "Because I never saw one."

Johnson: [00:13:37] Yeah.

Cook: [00:13:38] And if you look at my group photo that I provided, you'll see that out of the maybe eighty-five people in my platoon, there were only like six Black people. Yeah, you know. So it wasn't a very integrated.

Johnson: [00:13:57] Yeah.

Cook: [00:13:58] And. That had some ripple effects, too.

Johnson: [00:14:06] Yeah.

Cook: [00:14:07] And you also realize, we're talking about the sixties.

Johnson: [00:14:11] Yeah.

Cook: [00:14:12] And especially 1968, '69. There was a lot of turmoil going on with regard to race relations and some of that spilled over into the Marine Corps.

Johnson: [00:14:25] Yeah.

Cook: [00:14:26] And I remember one incident well, while I was in basic training. We were at the rifle range at Camp Pendleton in California, and it came back, and somebody said, "Hey, hey, William, did you hear what happened?" I said, "No." "What happened is that Martin Luther King was killed". I said, "What?" And Martin Luther King was killed because I had just saw him in Soldier Field two years earlier, 1966, when he had a rally in Soldier Field on the 4th of July. He later on after the rally, he drove through Washington Park on the south side, and I only lived a block away. So we were over in Washington Park, you know, barbecuing and stuff and somebody said, "Ooh, there's Dr. King. Dr. King", you know. And I saw Dr. King and saw what a kind, you know, guy. I never seen anyone that looked so kind, and his eyes were so, so bright

and everything. So when I heard that Martin Luther King got killed, I said, "Oh, no", you know, and I broke down. And then there was a Marine, I guess he was from South Carolina. I think he was he said, "Good, I'm glad they finally got that he N-word." And I turned around and I clobbered him.

Johnson: [00:15:50] Yeah.

Cook: [00:15:50] Yeah. One of the things I regret to this day hitting another Marine. But anyway, I ended up in the brig.

Johnson: [00:16:00] Yeah.

Cook: [00:16:01] And at that time, I just said, "Hey, if they can kill Martin Luther King, a guy like that, what am I doing here in the Marine Corps?"

Johnson: [00:16:12] Yeah.

Cook: [00:16:13] And I was ready to, you know, walk, walk, walk away.

Johnson: [00:16:19] Yeah.

Cook: [00:16:20] They gave me three days in the brig, but it was this sergeant in the brig, a Mexican guy. And one day I was in the brig, and he said, "Here, come here, Cook". And I came over. He said, "You see these guys over here?" I said, "Yeah". He said, "Now they belong here". He said, "But I've been watching you. You don't belong here. You need to get out of here and go out there and show them what you are really made of."

Johnson: [00:16:51] Yeah.

Cook: [00:16:54] And I'm thinking. 'Why? Why do you care about me? You know. I'm just another brig rat.

Johnson: [00:17:03] Yeah.

Cook: [00:17:04] But I got to thinking about that, and I said, "You know, that is why I came here."

Johnson: [00:17:10] Yeah.

Cook: [00:17:11] You know, I came here to. To really show who I am and what I can do, etc..

Johnson: [00:17:18] Yeah.

Cook: [00:17:19] And I got out of the brig, and they said, "Okay, you want to get processed out of the Marine Corps?" I said, "No, I came here to be a Marine and I'm not leaving until I am one."

Johnson: [00:17:31] Yeah.

Cook: [00:17:32] And I went on from there and ended up being promoted to private first class right out of boot camp.

Johnson: [00:17:40] Yeah. Let's see. So you ended up...Do you want to talk about how you ended up getting your MOS?

Cook: [00:17:52] Yeah, well, in the summer of 1967, I was working at Montgomery Ward's. At the old Montgomery Ward's warehouse, which is-- well, the building is still there -- Chicago and Orleans, something like that. And I was working in the warehouse as a parts order taker, you know. So I was taking orders for parts and, you know, getting them ready for ship out and delivery. So when I took my MOS test, I scored very hard, I'm sure. I'm sorry. I scored very high [said with emphasis] on things like organization. In fact, just about everything but math. [laughter] I got 71 in math, but everything else I scored very high and as a result they gave me the MOS of 3051, which is a basic warehouse supply.

Johnson: [00:18:54] Yeah. Let's see. And then you mentioned that I think during your time at your MOS, you tried to request to get sent to Vietnam, but it was denied.

Cook: [00:19:11] Yeah. I when I got to Okinawa, they said, "Okay, we need a supply man here, Cook, and that's you."

Johnson: [00:19:24] Yeah.

Cook: [00:19:25] And I said, "Oh no, I'm going to Vietnam with my, my crew."

Johnson: [00:19:28] Yeah.

Cook: [00:19:29] You know because we had all basic training made sort of a pact that we would look out for each--you know.

Cook: [00:19:36] And I said, you know, "No, no, I want to, I want to go to with my crew." They said, "No, you're here." So I got there and started doing my job and of course doing it to the best of my ability. And then one day I made a formal request to be sent to Vietnam.

Johnson: [00:20:00] Yeah.

Cook: [00:20:00] And the commanding officer called me into the office and sit me down. He said, "Okay". At the time I was a lance corporal. He said, "Okay, Lance Corporal Cook, here's the deal. We need you here. You're a United States Marine. Every Marine job is important.

Johnson: [00:20:20] Yeah.

Cook: [00:20:21] We get trucks to repair to send back to Vietnam. They're sending us trucks to repair. We don't have the parts. We don't have people getting parts for those trucks. They're sitting out there in a lot, unrepaired, while your brothers down in Vietnam have no transportation.

Johnson: [00:20:41] Yeah.

Cook: [00:20:42] "You say every job in the Marine Corps is important. You may want to go to Vietnam. We need you here. So get your head has wires together because this is where you're going to be, because this is where the United States Marine Corps needs you." And after that, I was okay with it. But they, they put it in my service record, request to go to RVN which is Republic of Vietnam. It didn't say it was denied.

Cook: [00:21:14] If just put it in there.

Johnson: [00:21:15] And I went on to do my best on Okinawa and as a result, our unit were able to repair trucks and-- Before the supply area at the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade Training Battalion on Okinawa at Camp Hansen where I was stationed, we didn't have anything lined up...There was no parts that the so called warehouse was abysmal.

Johnson: [00:21:47] Yeah.

Cook: [00:21:48] There was nothing. And it was the sergeant in charge before I got there. Yeah, well, the sergeant rotated out. And I was there by myself, and I wasn't supposed to be like administrative. I was just supposed to be able to pick out parts and give them to the mechanics to see if they fit. [unsure of last few words. I had to learn the administrative aspect of ordering parts. We had the old key punch. for the IBM key punch cards that you later put in the computer ,and they got the information in Philadelphia and Philadelphia would send to... But anyway, long story short, as a result of my efforts, we were turning out vehicles going back to Vietnam on a regular basis and the commanding general took notice of us and came to our shop and our repair area and with a crew from the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. And we got a big write up in the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper for outstanding work.

Johnson: [00:22:57] Yeah, let me I was going [to ask about] have that a little later, but I guess we can talk about that right now. So you want to talk about that *Stars and Stripes* article?

Cook: [00:23:06] Yeah, it was for the entire maintenance provisional maintenance battalion.

Johnson: [00:23:13] Yeah.

Cook: [00:23:14] All the mechanics, you know, it was just, by that time they had gave me some help. I had a private first class and a private working under me. Luis. Luis and Diez... Luis was Puerto Rican. I think Diaz was, too. They were from New York, but it was just us three in the supply and maybe about thirty mechanics working on trucks.

Johnson: [00:23:50] Yeah.

Cook: [00:23:50] And... we get the job done! You know, we, I mean, we had the commanding general come in and congratulate us on a job well done. I was just shocked. You know, they taking pictures and I was there at the time doing one of those key punch things for--To take to the Army base down the road from our base. And he took a picture of me and Private Diez and next thing you know...The *Stars and Stripes* newspaper and there's our unit. So I was kind of happy for our entire unit.

Johnson: [00:24:37] Yeah. Did you did any of your friends or family get to see it?

Cook: [00:24:41] Oh, no, no. [Chuckles]

Johnson: [00:24:41] Yeah.

Cook: [00:24:43] That was just for Okinawa.

Johnson: [00:24:44] Yeah.

Cook: [00:24:45] Or for the military. I, you know, I don't even know why, but for some reason, I just say, "Hey, let me cut this out and save it."

Johnson: [00:24:54] Yeah.

Cook: [00:24:54] And I saved it for a long period of time. And over the period of the last fifty-four years, I don't know where it's at, I did make a copy, so it's not too legible but--

Johnson: [00:25:07] Yeah, it's something. Yeah. Let's see. And then talking about, uh, Vietnam or Okinawa, throughout your time when you were serving, did you, like, hear about the protests and everything going on back at home and sort of how did that affect you, knowing that you were fighting in a war that was not super popular at home?

Cook: [00:25:37] Well, just so happens, we were pretty busy. [Laughter] And there wasn't a whole lot of news streams like there are today. You know, my auntie would send me *the Sun-Times*. Yeah, but by the time I got it, it was maybe a week or two weeks old. Yeah, but I do recall the summer of '68. Right down the street from where we're sitting, the Conrad Hilton Hotel, right across the street, the Democratic National Convention was going on.

Johnson: [00:26:20] Yeah.

Cook: [00:26:21] And I remember that there were super protests right outside the Conrad Hilton, that the National Guard had been called in. And then Mayor Daley, Richard J. Daley, the mayor of Chicago, made the infamous shoot to kill order. And, you know, that struck me as kind of bizarre how a mayor of Chicago would say shoot to kill other American citizens--

Johnson: [00:26:55] Yeah.

Cook: [00:26:56] --who were only protesting, albeit very demonstratively but still they weren't, you know, pulling out arms or anything.

Johnson: [00:27:05] Yeah.

Cook: [00:27:06] And that's the only thing I basically remember. But. I was always cognizant of the fact that, like I said, this was the sixties.

Johnson: [00:27:21] Yeah.

Cook: [00:27:22] And even though I was only maybe ten years old at the time, I remember Emmett Till [a fourteen-year-old African American boy from Chicago who was lynched and

killed in Mississippi, when visiting relatives there, in 1955. He became posthumously a symbol of the Civil Rights movement]

Johnson: [00:27:32] Yeah.

Cook: [00:27:32] Being memorialized at a funeral parlor only about half a mile from where I grew up at, over on State [St.], and I think it was 59th or 60th State, the funeral parlor. And I grew up on 58th and Wells and it was the talk of everybody in Chicago.

Johnson: [00:27:57] Yeah.

Cook: [00:27:57] You know, so from that point on, I was cognizant of the fact that the civil rights movement was a real thing, you know, and even though I was knowledgeable of it, I wasn't actively participating because I was just a kid.

Johnson: [00:28:16] Yeah.

Cook: [00:28:17] And when I got a little bit older, when I got sixteen, seventeen years old, that's when I really began to understand what it was all about.

Johnson: [00:28:28] Yeah.

Cook: [00:28:30] And like I said, the summer of '66, I was sixteen and I saw Martin Luther King, who actually lived on the South Side of Chicago after a period now. And I was aware of the Black Panthers who were unlike a lot of ways they portrayed: They were feeding children.

Johnson: [00:28:51] Yeah.

Cook: [00:28:51] You know, before there was school lunch programs and things like that, that came on. The Black Panther was doing that, providing medical care. They were doing all types of nice, good things in the community. So I was aware of that also. And I was also aware of the sports figures who were doing great things and the actors and things like that. I remember the March on Washington where Marlon Brando and Anthony Franciosa and all these other

prominent actors in there actually came to the March on Washington. I remember Mahalia Jackson, who had businesses here. I remember Joe Lewis. I remember all these people because in the in that period of time, the Black neighborhood was just that. It was a community within the city of Chicago.

Johnson: [00:30:04] Yeah.

Cook: [00:30:05] It was bordered by, I would say, Wentworth to the west, South Park, which later became Martin Luther King Drive to the east, Roosevelt Road to the North, and 59th Street to the south. That was the Black neighborhood.

Johnson: [00:30:27] Yeah.

Cook: [00:30:28] And it was a very nice neighborhood.

Johnson: [00:30:30] Yeah.

Cook: [00:30:31] I mean, I remember as a little kid, we used to sleep out on the parkway on 55th Street.

Johnson: [00:30:36] Yeah.

Cook: [00:30:37] And plenty of Black businesses, plenty of Black industry because there were jobs available. My grandmother, my grandfather, my grandfather was a Pullman porter, the one who served in World War I. My grandmother worked for Armor and Company, the meat packing company. So there was plenty of jobs. My uncles worked at the steel mill. My father did construction work for Keeney Construction Company. So there were plenty of jobs. So the economic well-being of the city, I mean, of the Black community was encapsulated in that geographical area that I just told you about. So you had real nice shops and restaurants and nightclubs. You could see some of the best entertainment the world had to offer. You know, I used to go to the Regal Theater. I would see James Brown, the Smokey Robinson, the Miracles, little Stevie Wonder, all on the same show! [Laughter]

Johnson: [00:31:50] Yeah.

Cook: [00:31:52] A lot of times. Aretha Franklin and all of that.

Johnson: [00:31:55] Yeah.

Cook: [00:31:56] And then you would go on the other side. They you would see people like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Louis Armstrong. You know, it was a beautiful time to be in Chicago as a Black person, even though it was segregated. It was a lot better than you would think. And the streets were well maintained. The neighborhood was well maintained. You had Bronzeville, where a lot of prominent Blacks lived. Rich Blacks lived on South Parkway. Madam C.J. Walker houses and Nat King Cole and people like that. So growing up in Chicago as a little boy, I remember, you know, all these things and then integration changed all that.

Johnson: [00:33:06] Yeah.

Cook: [00:33:08] So. We wanted to be incorporated in America and we thought integration was the way to do it.

Johnson: [00:33:19] Yeah.

Cook: [00:33:21] Integration turned out to be a disaster for Black people.

Johnson: [00:33:24] Yeah.

Cook: [00:33:26] Because you can't force yourself on people.

Johnson: [00:33:30] Yeah.

Cook: [00:33:33] You get to understand that. You have to set the example for people to want to incorporate you.

Johnson: [00:33:43] Yeah.

Cook: [00:33:44] And even though we were setting that example, we were still not being wanted into our, into the incorporation of America. So we forced the issue. Well, for lack of a better word, we forced issue, the laws forced the issue. The laws say, "Okay, if Mr. Jones wants to live on the other side of Halsted Street in the 61st, I mean in the 71st hundred block, he should be able to do that if he get the money." Yeah, well, Mr. Jones, move over to this 71st hundred block of Halstead St. on the side of Halsted or Carpenter or Morgan or Racine. And the White neighborhood said, "We don't want you here."

Johnson: [00:34:39] Yeah.

Cook: [00:34:40] Well, the law says, "I can be here." "Well, then we're leaving." and that's what happened.

Johnson: [00:34:45] Yeah.

Cook: [00:34:46] And it changed the the demographics of Chicago because when they built these expressways, the Eisenhower on the West Side, the Dan Ryan on the South Side, they built these expressways right through the heart of the Black community.

Johnson: [00:35:12] Yeah.

Cook: [00:35:14] And that disenfranchised that Black community. And then they built the projects to house the displaced people that were displaced because of the, the building of the expressway.

Johnson: [00:35:31] Yeah.

Cook: [00:35:32] And they put all these people in these high-rise projects. Well, some people were able to afford to move on the other side of Halsted St. in the 7100 block. And my family was one of them. Yeah, and that's the type of scenario I was speaking of yesterday. When we moved in, it was only one other Black family there.

Johnson: [00:35:59] Yeah.

Cook: [00:36:00] Next thing we know, everybody's house started going up for sale.

Johnson: [00:36:04] Yeah.

Cook: [00:36:04] And within two years, the whole neighborhood were, were Black--

Johnson: [00:36:10] Yeah.

Cook: [00:36:10] --And the whites moved out and that continued to happen as far south as Blacks went or far west as Black went.

Johnson: [00:36:19] Yeah.

Cook: [00:36:19] And it's pretty much changed the entire demographics of the city.

Johnson: [00:36:25] Yeah.

Cook: [00:36:26] So. Those are my memories of the sixties and seventies, the Civil Rights Movement and how that affected my psychic of--

Johnson: [00:36:43] Yeah. And did you say like a lot of the, you know, the important figures of the Civil Rights Movement and all the success that some African Americans are having, did that help inspire you to become a Marine?

Cook: [00:36:57] Well, what inspired me to become a Marine was the fact that as I said, I would see Americans being killed on the news every night.

Johnson: [00:37:16] Yeah.

Cook: [00:37:16] And I wanted to be someone that was going to put an end to that.

Johnson: [00:37:22] Yeah.

Cook: [00:37:23] And I knew the best way to be to put an end to that was to be a true warrior.

Johnson: [00:37:29] Yeah.

Cook: [00:37:30] And I knew that if I got drafted by the Army. I might end up as a cook.

Johnson: [00:37:38] Yeah.

Cook: [00:37:39] Or some other nondescript position. Yeah. But I knew as a Marine I would be definitely first to fight. And I would definitely be going to the heat of battle. So that's what primarily [word not heard]. And plus the fact that I wanted to show American society we're just as tough and brave as White people.

Johnson: [00:38:04] Yeah.

Cook: [00:38:05] You know, everybody that I would see them interviewing or giving any accolades to were White soldiers or White airmen or White-- And I said, "You know, we're just as tough, we're just as brave, how come we're not represented?"

Johnson: [00:38:21] Yeah!

Cook: [00:38:21] Well, I was going to change all that, you know.

Johnson: [00:38:24] Yeah. I guess another way to put it is like the, these Civil Rights figures, did they like, you know, inspire you to think I can [emphasized] do it, you know, in the sense of like I like like I can become a Marine and I can [emphasized] do the things that, you know, traditionally that, you know, back in the past was, you know, kind of not allowed for African-Americans?

Cook: [00:38:50] Well, not not so much the Civil Rights leaders, because most of the Civil Rights leaders were against the war. Yeah. Most of the major sports figures were not in favor of the

war. Yeah, I remember Muhammad Ali's famous words saying, "Why should I go over there and fight and kill people I don't know anything about? They never called me a-- the N-word? And he was correct, you know.

Johnson: [00:39:24] Yeah.

Cook: [00:39:25] So then there were others who said, "You're an American. You have an obligation to stand up for your country, and that's what you should do. So you had both sides of the equation, the Civil Rights leaders, much to their credit, they had their own situation to be concerned with just trying to stay alive. You got to realize, Malcolm X was killed, Medgar Evers was killed. So many other people were in the Civil Rights Movement. Leaders were killed or disenfranchised or blackballed or just totally ignored. So this was something that came out of my own character.

Johnson: [00:40:24] Yeah.

Cook: [00:40:25] To. To represent our and to represent it in a way that would make the efforts that were being touted by the Civil Rights leaders to show that their efforts were not in vain. It's kind of hard to say, "Oh, I deserve to be treated with like an American". I deserve to be treated with equal rights, etc. Well. But you're not doing anything to fight for those rights. You're not serving your country. You're not being of service. You're not showing that you don't just want the rights that you deserve the rights. So you had to have people that were marching over in Marquette Park with Martin Luther King, and you had to have people who were like Private First Class Harvey Milton, I'm sorry, Milton Olive who was a paratrooper in Vietnam and received a Congressional Medal of Honor, a Chicago native. So and you had to have people like me who were not this way or that way, but just totally focused on my own particular mission, which was I don't want to see Americans getting killed.

Johnson: [00:41:55] Yeah.

Cook: [00:41:56] You know, I can sympathize with the people that joined the military after 9-11 when we saw Americans being just killed. You know, I mean if that didn't want you to be an American or be patriotic, I don't know what would.

Johnson: [00:42:15] Yeah.

Cook: [00:42:16] You know, so I was just a patriotic young man. I wasn't too political. And I thought I was I thought I was pretty tough. I thought I was pretty brave. And so the Marine Corps was the way to go for me, you know?

Johnson: [00:42:32] Yeah.

Cook: [00:42:33] Yeah, I have no regrets.

Johnson: [00:42:36] So let's talk a little bit about your time in Okinawa. What was-- sometimes I ask this, what was the food like in Okinawa?

Cook: [00:42:44] The food?

Johnson: [00:42:45] Yeah.

Johnson: [00:42:46] The food was very good.

Johnson: [00:42:47] Yeah.

Cook: [00:42:47] Unless you're going to be on the Marine Corps base.[Laughter]

Johnson: [00:42:50] Yeah.

Cook: [00:42:50] I would. I would, quite naturally I had to go to different bases to get my orders for parts and other equipment. So I would go to the Army bases and so forth. But my favorite base on Okinawa was Kadena Air Force Base.

Johnson: [00:43:13] Yeah.

Cook: [00:43:14] And the food there was like eating at your grandmother's table.

Johnson: [00:43:18] Yeah.

Cook: [00:43:19] The Marine Corps food, no.

Cook: [00:43:22] Yeah, but the food. Kadena Air Force Base was great.

Johnson: [00:43:27] Yeah.

Cook: [00:43:28] In fact, when you go to the Air Force base, you realize just how Third World the Marine Corps is. Their NCO club, noncommissioned officer club on Kadena Air Force Base was better than the officer's club on the Marine Corps base.

Johnson: [00:43:51] Yeah.

Cook: [00:43:52] So that gives you an idea.

Johnson: [00:43:54] Yeah.

Cook: [00:43:55] So I would go there to eat every opportunity I'd get. And then when I would go on liberty, there was Kim Village right outside the base and we would eat at some of the Japanese restaurants there. And the food was very good there. It was, you know, Japanese, Japanese cuisine.

Johnson: [00:44:16] Yeah.

Cook: [00:44:16] And a lot of seafood, a lot of rice, vegetables, things like that. But it's very good because it's something about Okinawa, because I don't know if you know it, but Japanese people live the longest.

Johnson: [00:44:32] Yeah.

Cook: [00:44:33] On Okinawa than anywhere else on earth.

Johnson: [00:44:36] Yeah. So I know they made a lot of. Did you see any of the--? I think what I've read is that there were a lot of like businesses on Okinawa that were like centered around the military there, like Okinawa and businesses that like sold stuff to American soldiers. Did you see any of those?

Cook: [00:44:56] Oh, yeah. The village would not exist without the, the, the military, you know, because we, we bought, we spent all our money there, basically.

Johnson: [00:45:10] Yeah.

Cook: [00:45:11] At the time you got to realize Okinawa was still in United States Territory. Territory. It wasn't turned over to Japan yet.

Johnson: [00:45:21] Yeah.

Cook: [00:45:22] America had -- well I won't say occupied, but America had, after World War II, when all those Marines died taking Okinawa, America stayed there. And I think it wasn't until about maybe 1977... Before America turned Okinawa back over to Japan, but that was pretty much American territory. So all the villages outside of the military bases depended on Americans. And we would buy things from everything from eating in restaurants to having clothes made. I bought my first stereo equipment from the... I bought a bike where I used to go around and take pictures. I bought a camera.

Johnson: [00:46:20] Yeah.

Cook: [00:46:21] Where I would take pictures. Riding my bike outside the base and around the village and taking pictures around Okinawa.

Johnson: [00:46:27] Yeah.

Cook: [00:46:28] So, yeah, the nightclubs, of course, the village wouldn't exist without the economic support of the American bases there.

Johnson: [00:46:42] Yeah. And you mentioned you, I think you mentioned it in the pre-questionnaire about how you would take pictures around there. There are specific things you take pictures of or is it just, you know, well--

Cook: [00:46:56] I would just take pictures of things that we're interested in. I was riding around one time and I saw a little market, different fruits, and vegetables, took a picture that. Right around one time I saw some Geisha girls took pictures of that.

Johnson: [00:47:11] Yeah.

Cook: [00:47:11] Little kids standing alongside. They see me come up and they start saluting me. I took pictures and just, just any thing that really grabbed my interest.

Johnson: [00:47:23] Yeah. Did you do you, you still have any of those pictures?

Cook: [00:47:26] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, also, I took pictures of the Bob Hope Christmas show.

Johnson: [00:47:33] Yeah.

Cook: [00:47:35] When Bob Hope, you know, Bob Hope would entertain American troops no matter where in the world from World War II on: Korea, Vietnam. And he brought his show to Okinawa. And luckily, I was able to get up close to the stage and I took pictures of Bob Hope; Ann-Margret was with him, Rosey Grier, Dean Martin, Gold Diggers were there. It was pretty interesting.

Johnson: [00:48:06] Yeah. And then -- did you like did you interact at all with the locals there?

Cook: [00:48:14] Oh, yeah. [Laughs] Oh yeah. I interacted with them yeah. In various ways!
[both laugh]

Johnson: [00:48:22] Yeah.

Cook: [00:48:25] So yeah.

Johnson: [00:48:27] Yeah.

Cook: [00:48:27] And quite naturally, you develop a respect for people. Yeah. I mean, I didn't look down on anybody. I didn't think I was something special or anything. I tried to learn as much of the language as I possibly could. In fact, I was pretty good for a while, you know. And yeah, yeah. You know, I would interact with them.

Johnson: [00:48:54] Yeah. Did you? I know like they kind of a lot of times felt in somewhat of a similar situation that a lot of African Americans were feeling. Did you notice that at all?

Cook: [00:49:08] Well, what I noticed mostly is the fact that they resented that the United States were still in control of Okinawa. Yeah, they felt that that was their land, and that America should not be in control.

Johnson: [00:49:29] Yeah.

Cook: [00:49:29] In other words, if it's going to be a government organized should be Japanese. If you're going to be police force, it should be Japanese. So that they were beginning to protest the presence of America. Period. You know and I guess, yeah, they probably felt like they were being occupied.

Johnson: [00:49:55] Yeah.

Cook: [00:49:56] And. We didn't help it by some of us getting in trouble over there.

Johnson: [00:50:05] Yeah.

Cook: [00:50:06] And then we would be answerable only to America military, judicial system instead of a Japanese judiciary. They were. It was the beginning of the which later became mass, mass protests--

Johnson: [00:50:26] Yeah.

Cook: [00:50:27] --Until America finally capitulated and turned Okinawa's back over to Japan.

Johnson: [00:50:34] Did you see like--? Was it, was it like a general? Like, was it most of the Okinawans that you saw that were against the Americans having the base there? Did you also see people that were particularly like people that had businesses that were dependent upon Americans staying at the base there? Did you see them having sort of different viewpoints or were they still--?

Cook: [00:50:55] Well, I think they were all on the same page.

Johnson: [00:50:58] Yeah.

Cook: [00:50:58] Because they weren't so much against the bases as against the the fact that they had no say so in the structure and the government of Okinawa.

Johnson: [00:51:23] Yeah.

Cook: [00:51:23] In other words, your base can stay. But under our direction and you are to pay us for the land you occupy, and we will say what you can do and cannot do. And if somebody does something against our law, they're answerable to us.

Johnson: [00:51:48] Yeah.

Cook: [00:51:49] So they understood that the economics of America being there, they just did not want America having carte blanche control over that, over, over them and over there their land. It actually was their land. Even though we gave up a lot of blood and treasure to, to take that land, that that island.

Johnson: [00:52:20] Yeah.

Cook: [00:52:20] But it was their land and they wanted it. They wanted to control it.

Johnson: [00:52:29] Um. So. Oh. So you mentioned you also listened to jazz music while you were there. Did you have like a what did you use to listen to it?

Cook: [00:52:44] Oh, I bought my first stereo in the village. Right there. And it's ironic. The Japanese people are great lovers of jazz. People may not know that, but they are great lovers of jazz.

Johnson: [00:53:00] Yes.

Cook: [00:53:01] And I was able to find many albums that I would normally find in America right there.

Johnson: [00:53:09] Yeah.

Cook: [00:53:09] You know, I bought Wes Montgomery albums. I bought Miles, not Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Lee Morgan album. I mean, the liner notes and everything was in Japanese. Yeah, but the music was still jazz music.

Johnson: [00:53:25] Yeah.

Cook: [00:53:26] So even to this day, Japanese people are, you know, I admired that about them. Yeah. You know, they're, they're very great jazz lover and they know jazz. Yeah, they know it. They know that music.

Johnson: [00:53:40] Did the Okinawans on -- did they speak mostly Japanese, or did they speak any English?

Cook: [00:53:49] No, they they spoke a kind of a broken English.

Johnson: [00:53:54] Yeah.

Cook: [00:53:55] Just like I spoke a kind of broken Japanese, you know. Only they spoke better in English than I spoke Japanese. Yeah, but they, you know, you got to realize over a period of time, they kind of acclimated to that language.

Johnson: [00:54:10] Yeah.

Cook: [00:54:11] You know, I mean, I think it was, what, 1945 that America started occupying. So by the time I get there, you know, you're talking about almost half a century. You know, they had plenty of time to learn. Now the average Okinawan who didn't have any interaction with Americans probably spoke no English.

Johnson: [00:54:38] Yeah.

Cook: [00:54:39] Subjects. Strictly Japanese.

Johnson: [00:54:42] Yeah.

Cook: [00:54:43] But in places where there were businesses and the villages and things outside the bases. Yeah, they, it was incumbent upon them to know English because that's how, you know, they conducted business with Americans.

Johnson: [00:55:01] Yeah. And in terms of like your MOS that you did there, you want to just talk about like what the basically what you did for, for the Marines while you were there?

Cook: [00:55:14] Well, what I did when I came into the unit, like I said before, it was in total disarray. The warehouse was not properly set up. We had hardly any parts. We didn't have sufficient tools. We didn't have the nuts and bolts to get things done. We were scavenging for parts. And so I, I just jumped in right away, the Marine Corps way. And the Marine Corps way is, assess, adapt, and overcome. I assessed the situation, I adapted it and I said, "Hell, how can we overcome it?"

Johnson: [00:56:05] Yeah.

Cook: [00:56:06] So I made deals with guys in the Army, you know, I said, "Hey, I got some coils, I got some bearings. What do you got down there?" "Oh, we got some extra..." "Brother. I'll tell you what. I'll bring you some, 'cause you give me some. It's fine." And then as time went by, I learned how to do the administrative aspect of ordering.

Johnson: [00:56:29] Yeah.

Cook: [00:56:29] And that's when I got the, [computer punch] cards.

Johnson: [00:56:34] And start.

Cook: [00:56:35] Keying in the codes on the cards that went to the processing center down at the army base who would run them through a computer, you know, before computers used to be big, long rooms--

Johnson: [00:56:53] With--

Cook: [00:56:54] Big tapes. Well, they they got their information from the key punch cards that you would feed into a machine and that would go on to the tape, and then that would be transferred to Philadelphia. Philadelphia was the main hub for supplies.

Johnson: [00:57:14] And.

Cook: [00:57:14] Equipment for the Vietnam War. And so we would get our parts and equipment from Philadelphia. And then my fellow Marines mechanics would tell me, say, because I would have a big catalog. And I said, he said. We need interval bearings for a five-ton truck. I didn't know what that was.

Johnson: [00:57:42] Yeah.

Cook: [00:57:43] I didn't know about vehicles, and I would get the manual out and they said. Oh yeah. That's what we need. That's what. And so I would order, you know. And they said, "Oh, we need a new engine for a jeep or a two and a half—"

Johnson: [00:57:57] Ton.

Cook: [00:57:58] Or half-track or whatever. And I would get out the catalog, look at the normal nature of it, and card and key it in and order. Yeah. Next thing I know, we start having pilots coming in and coming in. So I had to set up the warehouse. Like a.

Johnson: [00:58:13] Warehouse. Yeah.

Cook: [00:58:15] And then I had I set up a certain system where when a certain power came in for a certain vehicle, I would know, okay, this, this vehicle is still out on the lot because it doesn't have X, Y, Z. So when I would come in, I'd say, okay, I got X, Y, Z for vehicle ABC. You can start working on it.

Johnson: [00:58:40] Yeah.

Cook: [00:58:41] And that's what I did. And then sometimes I would take a shortcut. I would say, well, you know, I get part number so and so and so for vehicle x, y, z, but I don't have parts on so and so for that same vehicle. So I'm going to give you this part. Yeah, I'll order another part for the other one and use it on this vehicle and get it out.

Johnson: [00:59:05] Yeah.

Cook: [00:59:05] Send it back to Vietnam.

Johnson: [00:59:07] Yeah.

Cook: [00:59:07] So it was, it was my mythology.

Johnson: [00:59:13] Yeah.

Cook: [00:59:14] I would have to say, you know, like I say assess, adapt, and overcome.

Johnson: [00:59:18] Yeah.

Cook: [00:59:19] Well, you don't always go in a straight line, okay. You do what you have to do to get the job done. If you have to take a shortcut or end around, that's what's important. You wanted to get those vehicles repaired and get them back to Vietnam because we had Marines down there who had to get things done.

Johnson: [00:59:40] Yeah.

Cook: [00:59:40] So that was our main focus, not just myself, all those guys. Those were some of the toughest guys I ever met. Some of the most dedicated guys. Yeah, I would come out all nice and sharp and starched fatigues and yeah, these guys would come by greased and oiled and elbow because they were on it. And I couldn't let them down, you know. I wanted them to have what they needed and that's what I did.

Johnson: [01:00:14] Was there a lot of pressure to like get things moving fast, like get vehicles repaired and back and--

Cook: [01:00:21] Well, I wouldn't say it was pressure, you know, it was Marine expectation. We were expected to do good things. Great things. You know, and to do them correctly and to do them properly. And promptly. That's, that's part of your training, whether you know it or not. You're, you're, you are prepared to do things correctly, promptly, and properly.

Johnson: [01:00:53] Yeah.

Cook: [01:00:53] You know, you are prepared to assess, adapt, and overcome whether it's a machine gun bunker or repairing a two-and-a-half-ton truck. The same philosophy, methodology applies.

Johnson: [01:01:09] Yeah. Did you like the logistics there? Like, obviously, like it's not easy to get all these parts out. Did you ever run into, like a lot of supply issues where you just didn't have the parts that you needed?

Cook: [01:01:25] Oh yeah, oh yeah. It was always a big delay. It was always a big delay. In fact, that's one of the things I expressed to the commanding general when he came to our shop.

Johnson: [01:01:39] Yeah.

Cook: [01:01:39] He said, "Well, Marine, is there anything you need or anything we can you want me to do?" I said, "Yes, General, we're waiting exceptionally long periods of time to get certain parts. And if we could get our parts expedited, we would get even more trucks out of here", you know. And he said, "Okay." Well, his adjutant took that, wrote that down, you know.

Johnson: [01:02:10] Yeah. So is there, were there any like, do you remember of any like specific parts or vehicles that like were just in constant demand?

Cook: [01:02:25] The two-and-a-half-ton truck.

Johnson: [01:02:26] Yeah.

Cook: [01:02:27] Which is used to transport personnel as well as to pull things like water tankers, generators or so on tow in there. Yeah, it was pretty much the workhorse of the Vietnam War.

Johnson: [01:02:49] Yeah.

Cook: [01:02:51] Later five-ton trucks, rarely 25 ton, but mostly jeeps. And two and a half ton were the major.

Johnson: [01:03:03] Yeah. Do you know if they were mostly like from combat damage or from just general wear and tear?

Cook: [01:03:13] Very few was from combat damage. Normally, combat damage is no repair. That's it. [Laughter]

Johnson: [01:03:21] Yeah.

Cook: [01:03:23] The other damage were like trucks going into craters.

Johnson: [01:03:28] Yeah.

Cook: [01:03:29] Or trucks going veering off the roads because of a motor attack. Driver might get out of the truck in a hurry and the truck keeps going and runs off into a ditch. Some broken axles, tire situations. Sometimes, the engine's blown. So you had to put a new engine in? Yeah, but I would say about 85% were not combat related.

Johnson: [01:03:57] Yeah.

Cook: [01:03:58] Only maybe about ten, 15% were combat related.

Johnson: [01:04:02] Yeah.

Cook: [01:04:02] Normally when a motor hit a truck or jeep, that's it!

Johnson: [01:04:07] Yeah. Did, did you ever like did you guys ever, like, get stuff in? And then they'd send it in and then you'd realize, like, oh, we can't fix this. Like, it's just too broken.

Cook: [01:04:18] No, no. Because the vehicles of that nature never came, got to Okinawa.

Johnson: [01:04:23] Yeah.

Cook: [01:04:23] They either shipped them back to San Francisco or San Diego somewhere where they were just scrapped and melted down and destroyed. But anything that looked like it was just impossible, it never came.

Johnson: [01:04:42] Yeah. You know, did you ever get, like, the same vehicle coming back multiple times?

Cook: [01:04:49] No. It was always something different.

Johnson: [01:04:52] Yeah. Let's see. Did you ever, like you said that there weren't, you know, there weren't very many combat damaged vehicles. But did you ever have to like did you ever get vehicles back that like maybe somebody had died in or something like that?

Cook: [01:05:09] No, but I did get vehicles that were sprayed with the defoliant.

Johnson: [01:05:14] Yeah.

Cook: [01:05:14] You know, you could tell that Agent Orange had been sprayed somewhere near or on the vehicle.

Johnson: [01:05:23] Yeah.

Cook: [01:05:24] And so we would have to get diesel fuel to wipe it down.

Johnson: [01:05:31] Yeah.

Cook: [01:05:32] You know, to get the green color back to it. But you could tell that this wasn't the red clay of Vietnam. This was something else. This was some type of chemical.

Johnson: [01:05:45] Yeah.

Cook: [01:05:46] So, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Johnson: [01:05:48] Did that affect you at all seeing that?

Cook: [01:05:52] It didn't affect me seeing it, but we do believe that it's an issue that should be investigated because we do believe that, that's equivalent to Agent Orange exposure, which is a major cause of prostate cancer in a lot of veterans...

Johnson: [01:06:22] Uh. Yeah. Let's see. Um. So I just have to find the next [moves page] --And did you enjoy what you did?

Cook: [01:06:40] Oh, yeah.

Johnson: [01:06:40] Yeah.

Cook: [01:06:41] Yeah, yeah, I. I enjoyed it because I you know, after I had my, you know, sit-down discussion with the commanding officer after he basically dismissed my request to be sent to Vietnam, I realized that, you know, I'm helping Marines.

Johnson: [01:07:05] Yeah.

Cook: [01:07:06] You know, I mean, if I was in Vietnam, I would be responsible for making sure we had sufficient grenades, sufficient M60 ammunition, sufficient sea rations, or whatever because that would be what they would need to complete their mission. Well, it's the same thing with the vehicle repair. You can't send them Marines out on patrol if they can't get to the area, the staging area. You can't pick up water buffaloes or that's what we used to call water tankers without a two-and-a-half-ton truck.

Johnson: [01:07:49] Yeah.

Cook: [01:07:50] You know, you can't transport the officers to different staging areas without jeeps...So I enjoyed what I was doing because I was, I was helping my fellow Marines and that was my only concern.

Johnson: [01:08:08] Yeah, yeah. Let's see. Yeah, I think there's a famous saying, it's like combat wins battles, but logistics wins wars.

Cook: [01:08:19] That's correct. That's correct. And logistics is a major aspect of, of, of winning wars. Without it, it's you just putting people out there. You know, and sooner or later they're going to run out of ammunition. Or. food or water or clothing or boots or whatever. And then, you know if you're not prepared for battle, you're just wasting time.

Johnson: [01:08:52] Yeah. It doesn't matter how good a soldier you are at that point.

Cook: [01:08:55] Yeah, yeah. And I wanted to make sure that I did my part.

Johnson: [01:09:02] Yeah.

Cook: [01:09:02] And that was my only concern.

Johnson: [01:09:05] Yeah. Let's see, did you did you get any skills from your time in the Marines that helped you at all later in life?

Cook: [01:09:20] Driving skills.

Johnson: [01:09:21] Yeah. [Laughter]

Cook: [01:09:22] I didn't know how to drive, until I got there. Well, I knew how to drive a little bit, but I became a better driver. In fact, as time went by, I was able to drive 25-ton trucks...Driving skills. Organizational skills, Leadership skills. Discipline.

Johnson: [01:09:46] Yeah.

Cook: [01:09:47] So, yeah, a lot of these qualities follow me out of the military into civilian life, even to this day.

Johnson: [01:09:57] Yeah. And I want to I think you mentioned that you worked at the DAV [Disabled Veteran] Um, and you were, you were you advocated for the recognition of Oscar Palmer?

Cook: [1:10:10] Yes.

Johnson: [1:10:11] Do you want to talk about that?

Cook: [01:10:13] Yeah. I worked for the government for twenty-five years as a US postal employee.

Johnson: [01:10:20] Yeah.

Cook: [01:10:21] And once I retired, I continued my education and got my paralegal degree.

Johnson: [01:10:28] Yeah.

Cook: [01:10:29] And once I got my paralegal degree, my national service officer with the DAV saw some of my legal writings and said, "Hey, we could use a guy like you."

Johnson: [01:10:41] Yeah.

Cook: [01:10:42] I said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Oh, sure. I said, I want to make sure. I said, I always wanted to do something to make sure the veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq get better treatment than we get the Vietnam veterans. He said, "Well, you'd be an ideal candidate for a national service officer position". So I went to Washington, D.C. I interviewed for the job, and they hired me. And they said, "Well, where would you like to go?" I said, "Oh, send me to Chicago." And they said, "Oh, no, we need you in Phoenix, Arizona".

Johnson: [01:11:20] Yeah. [Laughter]

Cook: [01:11:21] I said what? I said, "Okay, if that's where I gotta go, where I'm needed, that's where I go." And that's where I went as a trainee at the, as a national service officer, for disabled American veterans in Phoenix. And while I'm there one of the local newspapers had an article about Oscar Palmer Austin, a Congressional Medal of Honor, United States Marine. And I started reading it and I said, "Wow, this is similar to me."

Johnson: [01:11:57] Yeah.

Cook: [01:11:58] Number one, Oscar Austin was a Marine. Number two, he came in the Marine Corps right about the same time I was in basic training.

Johnson: [01:12:10] Yeah.

Cook: [01:12:11] And I begin to think, 'Did I know him? Did I meet him?' The next thing, we were about the same age. He was maybe about four years. I mean, four months older than me.

Johnson: [01:12:25] Yeah.

Cook: [01:12:27] And he got sent to Vietnam because he was only nineteen years, two months old when he was killed in Vietnam. And he received the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously. His family received it posthumously. He was awarded it for gallantry when he saved the lives of three or four of his fellow Marines.

Johnson: [01:12:57] Yeah.

Cook: [01:12:59] After rescuing a couple before he was mortally wounded.

Johnson: [01:13:03] Yeah.

Cook: [01:13:06] So the story kind of mirrored the exploits of another Black soldier, U.S. Army Private First-Class Milton Olive, the Chicago native. But what really intrigued me more about PFC Palmer was the fact that we were in boot camp at the very same time.

Johnson: [01:13:39] Yeah, yeah.

Cook: [01:13:40] We joined the Marine Corps just about the same time. Were both about the same age. We were both Black. He went to Vietnam. I went to Okinawa.

Johnson: [01:13:51] Yeah.

Cook: [01:13:51] I mean, he ended up dying gallantly, you know, while I'm on Okinawa, you know, sipping brewskis and schmoozing with the local Joseis [i.e. women].

Johnson: [01:14:05] Yeah.

Cook: [01:14:06] And I got to thinking, 'Wow, that could have been me.'

Johnson: [01:14:12] Yeah.

Cook: [01:14:13] But more importantly, I wanted everybody to know about this individual because I had never heard of him until I was a national service officer in Phoenix. So I got associated with the Buffalo Soldiers...Who are a motorcycle club in Phoenix, Arizona. But the Buffalo Soldiers I drew out [of the] United States of America. Yeah, that's. That's the Phoenix Chapter.

Cook: [01:14:47] And they were instrumental in getting a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who was killed during the -- I want to say that the Native American uprising or something like that -- when Geronimo was running through Arizona and, you know, with reckless abandonment, but he was a Black soldier, received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Johnson: [01:15:22] Yeah.

Cook: [01:15:22] And they got his body in turn from Phoenix to Arlington National Cemetery.

Johnson: [01:15:30] Yeah.

Cook: [01:15:30] And they want to do the same thing with Oscar Austin, but his family wanted him to stay there, so we wanted to get his name placed on the wall of honor, which wasn't there.

Johnson: [01:15:42] Yeah.

Cook: [01:15:43] I remember when I went out to the cemetery to find his gravesite and I'm looking around, I'm thinking a Congressional Medal of Honor, it should be something really spectacular.

Johnson: [01:15:52] Yeah.

Cook: [01:15:53] And the cemetery worker was out there trying to help me find it. And then finally some something directed me there, as if the spirit of PFC Palmer was directing me. And there, there was his gravesite: Oscar Palmer Austin. Died. Born So-and-So and Died. Congressional Medal of Honor.

Johnson: [01:16:16] Yeah.

Cook: [01:16:17] So that's, that's when I really began to learn. Then I subsequently learned that a Navy cruise ship was named in his honor, and the Noncommissioned Officer Club at Quantico, Virginia, is named in his honor. So what we're trying to do is get a high school that he attended in Phoenix named in his honor.

Johnson: [01:16:42] Yeah. So, you know, it seems like, you know, you believe that the honoring America's heroes is very important. Do you feel that like even today, we still like we don't honor America's heroes enough?

Cook: [01:17:01] Well, I think I think things are changing.

Johnson: [01:17:05] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:08] My nephew gave me that veteran's hat for my 65th birthday.

Johnson: [01:17:15] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:17] I guess he didn't hear Marlin with 3X scope.

Johnson: [01:17:24] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:26] Or Nikon 2000.

Johnson: [01:17:29] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:30] 60. 28 to 103 zoom lens. I guess that part must have went by. I ended up getting a hat.

Johnson: [01:17:42] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:42] But ever since I got the hat, I've been wearing it. And whenever I wear that hat, I don't care where I'm at in the grocery store, walking down the street, or whatever. People come up to me and said, "Thank you for your service."

Johnson: [01:17:57] Yeah.

Cook: [01:17:58] And. I just never can actually get to grips with that because you've got to realize, for forty-five years, the Vietnam veteran was pretty much dismissed, you know.

Johnson: [01:18:13] Yeah.

Cook: [01:18:14] So. And that part of it is turning around. People realize that even if you don't like the war, you should never dismiss the warrior. Because even though that might have been Vietnam. And even though that might have been Afghanistan or Iraq, these are the same people who are going to stand up for America and keep America safe if they came to New York, Chicago, or San Francisco. These are the same individuals who are willing to leave family and friends and loved ones to risk their lives to keep America safe and to let the enemy know whoever he may be, whoever he may think he wants to be, let them know they will always be stout hearted young men and women willing to protect this country.

Johnson: [01:19:14] Yeah.

Cook: [01:19:15] So. I think the war, the heroes need to first be recognized by those who came home.

Johnson: [01:19:30] Yeah.

Cook: [01:19:33] PFC Austin. PFC Palmer. I mean, PFC Olive and PFC Palmer never came back home.

Johnson: [01:19:44] Yeah.

Cook: [01:19:45] Both of them died before their 20th birthday.

Johnson: [01:19:48] Yeah.

Cook: [01:19:50] So it's incumbent upon us who dare come home to make sure their sacrifice is not forgetting.

Johnson: [01:20:00] Yeah.

Cook: [01:20:01] And so that is why I advocate so hard for individuals like Private First-Class Oscar P. Austin and Private First Class Milton J. Olive to be recognized in some manner so that one day a little kid going to Phoenix Union High School and its named, the Oscar P. Austin High School. They're going to say, why is the name Oscar P. Austin?

Johnson: [01:20:41] Yeah.

Cook: [01:20:42] And then they'll have a picture of a Black young man who was willing to give his life not only for his country, but for his fellow Marines.

Johnson: [01:20:52] Yeah.

Cook: [01:20:53] And. It'll give them some desire to have some type of pride and lofty goals of their own. Yeah, I mean, you don't have to serve in the military, but you can serve some kind of way. You can. You can do something to help others, or you can just be a good citizen.

Johnson: [01:21:16] Yeah.

Cook: [01:21:16] You know, when you're just a good citizen, you serve in your country.

Johnson: [01:21:20] Yeah.

Cook: [01:21:21] So everybody is not meant for the Marine Corps or the Navy or the Army or military. Period. Everybody's not meant to be a police officer or a fireman or a paramedic. Yeah, you know, but you can do other things, you know?

Johnson: [01:21:35] Yeah.

Cook: [01:21:35] Just be a good citizen. Treat other Americans the way you want to be treated.

Johnson: [01:21:40] Yeah.

Cook: [01:21:40] You know, you're a hero when you do that to me. You're a hero. Yeah. Yeah. So it's incumbent upon us who did come home to make sure our brothers and sisters who have fallen, are not forgetting and that they get the recognition they deserve.

Johnson: [01:22:01] Yeah. Do you think that, you know, at the time there were there were people who did great things and didn't make it back who weren't properly recognized at the time?

Cook: [01:22:14] Oh, yeah, oh, many, many. There were many untold stories of heroes' heroism and there are some people they get recognition that should have got even more.

Johnson: [01:22:34] Yeah.

Cook: [01:22:37] And there's also the people here at home who never get the recognition they deserve.

Johnson: [01:22:48] Yeah.

Cook: [01:22:50] I remember when I was at Great Lakes Naval Hospital. When I came back, I got, I had I had an injury. And I remember every Sunday, the people up there in North Chicago

would come to the Great Lakes Hospital and all the Vietnam veterans and everything layin' in their beds and some of them had spinal cord injuries or concussions and so on. They would bring toilet articles. They would sing and pray for the veterans. They would bring little candy and things like that, you know, you never heard nobody never heard about that.

Johnson: [01:23:31] Yeah.

Cook: [01:23:31] The little school kids that would send care packages over to the veterans' candy and stuff like that. You know, sometimes we would just pass it out to little kids. The veterans in Vietnam would pass out to the kids. We would pass out some to the kids on Okinawa and stuff like that. But it was the little school kids and everything that would send things over there. You never hear about stuff like that.

Johnson: [01:23:56] Yeah.

Cook: [01:23:57] You know, so ...there's a lot of unsung heroes. It's a lot of men who sacrificed their life for their fellow soldiers or fellow Marines or fellow airmans. There's a lot of stories that should be told.

Johnson: [01:24:20] Yeah.

Cook: [01:24:21] I am honored to be able to tell my story. I'm thankful to the Pritzker Museum of Military History and the Pritzker Museum of Military Library here in Chicago for the opportunity to tell my story.

Johnson: [01:24:44] Yeah.

Cook: [01:24:44] I mean, I'm pretty sure that Pritzker's not going to get a whole lot of credit for doing that but they're doing it. And as time goes by and years go by, people are going to appreciate that. You know, they're hearing the perspective of just the average kid from the South Side of Chicago who had a desire to serve his country, to be a United States Marine and to protect this country from any enemy, whether it's foreign or domestic. And that's a story that is really told.

Johnson: [01:25:20] Yeah.

Cook: [01:25:21] So. I don't consider myself one of the unsung heroes.

Johnson: [01:25:26] Yeah.

Cook: [01:25:27] But. I'm still alive. So maybe one day I might be able to take that label and place it on myself. But until then, I'm okay.

Johnson: [01:25:41] Yeah, let's see. And then one of the questions that so at Pritzker, sort of part of our mission statement is we emphasize the citizen soldier. And what we like to ask is what in your mind makes a citizen soldier?

Cook: [01:26:04] What makes a citizen soldier is that they incorporate the qualities they obtain in the military into civilian life. That they set an example for their peers, that they do something to help make life better for others, that they put others before themselves, that they show humility and they show a sense of decency that is sorely missing, sorely missing in society in general.

Johnson: [01:26:42] Yeah.

Cook: [01:26:42] So. There's a dedication to duty. There's the work ethic. There's a sense of pride in what you do. There's a degree of honesty and humility that you bring to the table. There's a sense of direction, a purpose. All these qualities you attain in the military, and you bring it into society as a civilian. You realize that the sum of everything is greater than you and that's what you bring. So if you see an unjust situation, you try to correct it.

Johnson: [01:27:31] Yeah.

Cook: [01:27:32] If you see somebody needing help, you reach out a helping hand.

Johnson: [01:27:38] Yeah.

Cook: [01:27:39] If you see something that needs to be corrected and you have the skills or knowledge or ability to correct it, you don't wait for others to do it. You take the lead. That's what makes a citizen soldier. Yeah. That's why a lot of businesses and corporations seek veterans to hire because they know veterans have a lot of qualities that are just not common in today's society, no matter how much education you get, you know, no matter how much knowledge you obtained. If you don't have character, you're a sad, empty person.

Johnson: [01:28:32] Yeah.

Cook: [01:28:33] And if I was an employer and employee A an applicant A came to me and said, "Oh, yes, I have a four-year degree. And I went to Harvard, and I went to ba ba." You know, the first question I said, "What have you did in your personal life? Or how did you go to college?" "Well, my mom paid for my college. My dad paid. I lived in the base. My dad bought me my first car and I['d] say, "Okay, thank you very much. Do you work on any civic organizations? Do you do any volunteer work?" "No." "Well, what do you do with your free time?" "Well, I get Game Boy and I have a few friends. We hang out at the Dewdrop Inn, and we have a couple of brewskis, and we play ping, ping pong..."

Johnson: [01:29:33] Yeah.

Cook: [01:29:34] But Applicant B comes in and say, "I'm sorry, I don't have a four-year degree, I have an associate's degree, and I have worked very hard in all my jobs. I pay for my own education. I bought my own car. You know, I do charity work. I do volunteer work. I help at the food pantry."

Johnson: [01:29:57] Yeah.

Cook: [01:29:58] "I give. I give part of my salary to the Red Cross, I. Blah, blah, blah, blah." It's a no brainer who I'm going to hire. Yeah. Yeah. Because that shows character.

Johnson: [01:30:14] Yeah.

Cook: [01:30:15] You know, and character is one of the greatest assets an individual can have. And when you're in the military, it develops your character.

Johnson: [01:30:29] Yeah.

Cook: [01:30:30] You know, you learn to look out for your fellow man and your fellow Marine or your fellow soldier. You learn that's what they, they judge you on. I believe that's what they judged me on when I became private first class out of boot camp, because one day we were on a five-mile hike and the drill instructor came up to me and said, "Ah, Private Cook, make sure nobody left behind."

Johnson: [01:31:03] Yeah.

Cook: [01:31:05] And I want everybody at the end of this five-mile hike that started. Well, we were up in, like, mountainous terrain in Camp Pendleton.

Johnson: [01:31:15] Yeah.

Cook: [01:31:16] So there was some guys and we had full gear: rifle, pack, everything. And there were some guys lagging behind. So I would have to run all the way back to bring them up, you know, somebody else logging on. So my final five-mile hike ended up to be about fifteen miles. But one thing about it, I made sure everybody finished. Yeah, nobody got left behind.

Johnson: [01:31:41] Yeah. You know.

Cook: [01:31:42] I didn't think of nothing about it at the time, but now, as years go by, I realized that's what that was about. They were trying to see if I had the type of character and that they could depend on my ability to be a good leader, you know, before they would put a stripe on my arm.

Cook: [01:32:05] You know, and I didn't think nothing else about it, you know, because I didn't shoot the expert. Normally if you shoot expert on the rifle range, you automatically going to be

private first class. I shot marksman. I didn't even shoot sharpshooter. I shoot marksman. That's disqualified. [Laughs]

Johnson: [01:32:23] Yeah.

Cook: [01:32:25] But I made PFC.

Johnson: [01:32:26] Yeah.

Cook: [01:32:27] And. Those type of things develop your character. You know, my when he said five-mile hike, I was just saying, "I'm going to try to make it, you know?" I wouldn't even think about trying to make sure somebody else make it.

Johnson: [01:32:42] Yeah.

Cook: [01:32:43] But they saw something in me that they decided we're going to entrust you to make sure nobody is left behind. I didn't want to let them down. You put in trust in me and I'm not going to let you down.

Johnson: [01:32:56] Yeah. So you basically we've one through everything on here. We have about twenty-eight minutes left in terms of time. Is there anything that we haven't talked about yet that you want to talk about?

Cook: [01:33:15] Well, let's see. Where do we want to begin? I'll go back to the fact that Black Americans have been disproportionately dismissed As far as being Number one accepted in society. Number two, accepted as Americans. And number three, given the recognition that their due. There's a lot of stuff being bandied about around about critical race theory and all this other stuff. Well. The history of America is a complete story.

Johnson: [01:34:11] Yeah.

Cook: [01:34:14] If you leave out any aspect of it, you're not telling the complete story. You're making a fictional account of America.

Johnson: [01:34:27] Yeah.

Cook: [01:34:28] So I grew up in the fifties and sixties during some of the most turbulent time for Black Americans. The civil rights movement was going on. The Civil Rights Act was being debated, hadn't been passed yet until later on. Equal employment, equal access to education, transportation, etc., etc. Well, if you try to eliminate that and just tell ... a certain segment of that appeases you, you take away from the fabric of America.

Johnson: [01:35:28] Yeah.

Cook: [01:35:29] And when I say the fabric of America all through history, even in slavery times. White people were instrumental in helping Black people.

Johnson: [01:35:41] Yeah.

Cook: [01:35:42] So if you try to eliminate slavery, you eliminate the individuals who helped end slavery. A lot of people don't think about when you you're trying to eliminate certain aspects of things, you eliminate some of the things, you know, because if I was the little kid and they said, "Okay, America enslaved people and that was bad." I didn't say, "But there were Quakers who were White people who tried to get that taken away." You know, "Civil Rights Movement. Oh, well, the Civil Rights Movement. They turned dogs and water hoses on Black people." "Yeah, but Viola Liuzzo, a young mother from Detroit, Michigan, went down. A White woman went down south to help transfer Blacks so that they could register to vote. The Freedom [Summer] Riders, Jewish guys from big cities got on busses. Some of them got beat. Some of them got killed. Andrew [i.e., Michael] Schwerner and [James] Chaney. You know. You know. You take away the true story."

Johnson: [01:37:06] Yeah.

Cook: [01:37:06] Of this thing, you know, by trying to only tell the good part.

Johnson: [01:37:15] Yeah. And not the whole story. Yeah.

Cook: [01:37:18] Or just tell the bad part and not the whole story.

Johnson: [01:37:22] Yeah.

Cook: [01:37:23] You know, a lot of the progress that Blacks have made were also things that were done by other Americans who were White. You know, the Civil Rights movement was not just Black people. They were White people also.

Johnson: [01:37:50] Yeah.

Cook: [01:37:50] You know, the abolitionist movement, we're not just Frederick Douglas and -- there were White people. NAACP was founded by all White people.

Johnson: [01:38:03] Yeah.

Cook: [01:38:03] Okay, so. That's a story that also goes into the military. If you're going to tell the story of the battle of Hill 81 or any other serious battle during the Second World War, the First World War, you gotta tell the whole story.

Johnson: [01:38:39] Yeah.

Cook: [01:38:40] You know, you got to tell about the Black infantry that were under in World War II that was under constant, constant bombardment for eighty-nine days in a row without any reprieve, any any support. But they held the line. You got to tell about the 54th Massachusetts Regiment who attacked Fort Wagner.

Johnson: [01:39:09] Yeah.

Cook: [01:39:09] All Black. But the commander of it was a White guy. You know, so we can all have our own set of opinions, but we can't have our own set of facts. If you're going to tell America history, tell all the facts. Don't label it as Critical Race Theory. "Well, I don't want my children to feel ashamed". Well, I would feel proud to know that, "Oh, really? We enslaved

people. But look at all the people who were like me who came to their aid to help them become free individuals."

Johnson: [01:39:47] Yeah.

Cook: [01:39:48] "Oh, we [were] discriminated against. Oh, but look at all the people that look like me who came to make sure that their voices were heard."

Johnson: [01:39:58] Yeah.

Cook: [01:39:59] You know, in fact, if it was been any other way, this the neither one of those institutions, slavery or civil rights, would ever came to pass. So I think that the military should also adopt a policy of not only telling the exploits of White organizations or White infantries or White units but also tell the story of the Tuskegee Airmen--

Johnson: [01:40:40] Yeah.

Cook: [01:40:41] Who flew mini missions over Germany protecting bombers and never lost the one, never lost a plane. In fact, the bombardier, the pilots of the bomber say, "Hey, we want the Red Tails, we want the Tuskegee. If we're going over Germany, we want them to be with us."

Johnson: [01:41:03] Yeah.

Cook: [01:41:04] So my whole point is there's no such thing as Critical Race Theory. It's either fact or fiction.

Johnson: [01:41:16] Yeah.

Cook: [01:41:16] And if you're going to choose fiction, that's on you. But if you're going to choose facts, tell all the facts.

Johnson: [01:41:23] Yeah.

Cook: [01:41:23] You know, tell the story about Milton J. Olive. Yeah, tell the story about Oscar Austin. Tell all the stories, you know, tell the stories about Joe Lewis who went into the military during World War II and many, many Blacks who were totally against the military followed into the mil[itary] because of Joe Lewis, who ended up dying almost penniless. But because of Frank Sinatra, who was a White man, he literally gave this guy a job at Caesar's Palace so that he wouldn't have to go to his grave as a homeless, destitute person.

Johnson: [01:42:11] Yeah.

Cook: [01:42:11] You know, this was Frank Sinatra. Yeah. So. We need to make sure that our history is incorporated. In America, there's no such thing as Black history and White history. It's American history. The only difference is Blacks have to use that label because otherwise we wouldn't even get noticed. You know, we wouldn't even get recognized. So the term Black History had to be incorporated.

Johnson: [01:42:45] Yeah.

Cook: [01:42:46] You know, Black Lives Matter had to be incorporated. Not that all lives don't matter. It's because the only lives that didn't seem to matter were the Black lives. Not that there were no beautiful Black women. The Miss America Pageant only had White women. So we had to had the Black Miss America Pageant. It's unfortunate, we have to put that pre acknowledgment in front of things, but that's the only way we can get that, enough recognition. So my hope and my desire before I leave this earth is that we won't have to have Black History Month. We'll have a History Month. That includes all of America's accomplishments. We'll have a history that incorporates everything that has been done in America without fictionalizing part of it, but telling the whole story with all the facts, the good, the bad, the ugly but it's all-American history. Yeah, and that's the only way forward for this nation to heal its wounds is to incorporate all its people into its history.

Johnson: [01:44:12] And you think we're heading in that direction?

Cook: [01:44:17] I hope so. Hope springs eternal.

Johnson: [01:44:21] Yeah.

Cook: [01:44:22] I hope so. Because Martin Luther King once said, "We'll either live together as one, or die separately as fools", or something. I'm paraphrasing, now. You know, and that's the only way we're going to get out of this quagmire, because it makes absolutely no sense for Americans to be at war with each other. We got fifty countries waiting to destroy us at any given minute. We can't, we don't have the luxury of not sticking together and being cohesive. Yeah, we ain't got to love each other which would be nice, but we should at least respect each other. And we should at least acknowledge each other.

Johnson: [01:45:10] Yeah.

Cook: [01:45:11] Because America didn't just get to be America by Black people or White people. America got to be America by Black people, White people, Yellow people, Red people, etc.

Cook: [01:45:27] Yeah. It's all one big bowl of people who made the soup as it is. You know, and it's time for us to acknowledge it. I don't only want Black military guys to be acknowledged. I want some of the Mexican guys, too. I want some of the Puerto Rican guys to be-- Two of the guys that worked under me were Puerto Rican, you know. "Mexicans, you go to the Marine Corps". I'd say one out of every six Marines are Mexican descent.

Johnson: [01:46:08] Yeah.

Cook: [01:46:11] You know, Asian Americans, you know, they're they're very prominent also.

Johnson: [01:46:20] Yeah.

Cook: [01:46:21] So. I want everybody to get recognized.

Johnson: [01:46:27] Yeah.

Cook: [01:46:27] And I want that recognition to be incorporated into the history and into the psychic and mindset of all Americans so that little kids growing up will see both sides of the equation. You know, you won't have to feel guilty if you only know that people were enslaved.

Johnson: [01:46:50] Yeah.

Cook: [01:46:51] You'll feel better when you learn that while people that look like me helped them get un-slaved [said with emphasis]. Or de-slaved.

Johnson: [01:46:59] Yeah.

Cook: [01:47:01] You won't have to feel guilty when you see that they turn dogs and water hoses on little kids and kept them from eating in restaurants. Yeah, because people like me that look like me helped them to get equal treatment. You know, a Southerner from Texas who was the president of the United States signed the Civil Rights Act after he lobbied and did everything he could to get senators on board to pass it. "Oh, that guy looks like me'.

Johnson: [01:47:34] Yeah.

Cook: [01:47:34] Okay, so tell the whole story, you know, and don't leave nothing or nobody out. And whether it's in the military or in civilian life, do that. And as a citizen soldier, live a life worthy of the fact that you came home, live a life worthy of the sacrifices that those who did not come home made. Live a life worthy to be a better American and make America a better place. That's what the citizen soldier's obligation is. Because when you took that oath to serve, to defend, protect and defend the United States of America and the Constitution, it did not end the day you came out of the service. That's an oath that last year for the rest of your life and you should treat it as such.

Johnson: [01:48:31] Yeah, yeah. Let's see. We have about twelve minutes. Do you want to - is there anything else you want to add or--?

Cook: [01:48:41] No, I just I just I just want to thank the Pritzker Museum here in Chicago. The staff is very knowledgeable. The staff is very unique. This is a unique opportunity to give a point of view that may never have been given before or a story that nobody would have ever heard.

Johnson: [01:49:14] Yeah.

Cook: [01:49:15] So I think this entire Pritzker Museum and Library is a very unique place. It honors veterans. It honors the history of the off the veterans. It's a very unpretentious place.

Johnson: [01:49:35] Yeah.

Cook: [01:49:35] I mean, they don't walk around beating their chest on what they're doing or sticking their nose up like, "Oh, look at me." "They're just here. They just doing things. And, and what they're doing is, is, is admirable."

Johnson: [01:49:51] Yeah.

Cook: [01:49:52] So I'm, I'm just happy to have the opportunity to express that.

Johnson: [01:49:58] Yeah. And we want to thank you for your service, first of all, and thank you for coming in. Sure. We appreciate being able to hear your story. And I hope, you know, it'll be helpful for people down the road. And we want to offer you the Pritzker challenge coin.

Cook: [01:50:19] Okay.

Johnson: [01:50:20] It's just kind of a token of our appreciation for you coming in.

Cook: [01:50:24] Thank you.

Johnson: [01:50:24] Yeah.

Cook: [01:50:25] Very nice. Thank you very much.