

## Paul T. Cook: Montauk in the Man

By Russell Drumm

(09/07/2007) Pointing, Paul T. Cook said he lived right there, where an invisible vertical line met an invisible horizontal line, according to the grid he had cleverly placed around a photograph of the old Montauk Village on Fort Pond Bay where he grew up.

He used a grid, he said, because he didn't want to clutter the old photo with arrows, or numbers. An index below the picture identifies other buildings and gives their coordinates.

Mr. Cook, now retired after a 22-year career in the Navy and a second, 23-year career with the military contractor General Dynamics, spent months putting his history together in a book beautifully bound near his house in Bonn, Germany. He put it together to share at a family reunion last month in Arizona before returning east to Montauk, his hometown. It's not the only book he's finished since retiring.

"Now I'm writing and playing golf," he said while sitting beside the Montauk Downs golf club's pro shop recently. He explained how it was his sister, Ruth, who encouraged him to write. She told him that the Montauk Historical Society was interested in his recollections.

"So, I wrote 14 pages and drew a sketch of the old village. The pages became the centerfold article in a book by Peg Winksi called 'Montauk: An Anecdotal History' published in 1997. People said they wanted more," he said.

Mr. Cook's first book, "From Montauk To . . .," is autobiographical. He aimed his second book, "The Adventures of Mon and Tauk" at children with a story of two mussels, a brother and sister, who spend a day clinging to a pier in Fort Pond Bay waiting for the tide to come in. His latest tome, "Point of Entry — Montauk," is an international potboiler set in some of the many places Mr. Cook has traveled to in his colorful life. The books can be found at Barnacle Books in Montauk, BookHampton, and online at Amazon.

Pointing again to the photo, Mr. Cook identified the post office not far from his childhood house. He then turned the page to reveal an old "Wanted" poster featuring a man named John Harris. Seems that Mr. Harris, Montauk's postmaster in the late 1920s, had embezzled money from the office and was on the lam.

"Dad was a railroad express agent. He wore a pistol. When he saw the poster, he applied for the postmaster's job." Mr. Cook said his father, Theodore Cook, worked as Montauk's postmaster from 1930, when he was appointed by President Herbert Hoover, until 1965. "My brother, John, found this poster on eBay."

"I always said, 'I wish every child could be raised here.' I remember in the mid-30s when I was 4 years old, occasionally a car from the city would come on the sand and gravel roads. I'm sure they were asking, 'Who would want to live in this godforsaken place?'"

"We would go to school on the Bluebird bus from the Loftus General Store, just six or eight kids carrying our lunches. Families were not rich. I saw teachers take 4 cents out of their pockets to help kids buy a half-pint of milk. During the summer, there were so many things to do."

"I remember watching the fishing boats, fishermen mending nets, building lobster pots, unloading fish at Jake Wells Dock, fish drummers from the Fulton Market buying fish for 15 or 16 cents a pound. Fish boxes made of heavy pine filled with ice. They would go to the market on Swayze's trucks or by rail. There was the Railroad Dock, the Union News Dock, and Duryea's Dock. Freight cars would go out onto the Railroad Dock and winches would hoist the fish boxes onto the cars."

Mr. Cook said that after the 1938 Hurricane devastated the old fishing village, he went to live with his grandparents in Greenport for a time. "Father continued to work at the post office and visited on weekends."

He graduated from East Hampton High School with the class of 1946. "We didn't have any money for college so I joined the Navy. Father signed the induction papers because I was only 17." His assignments were many and varied. Mr. Cook taught electronics, served in Alaska during the Korean War. Later, he spent time on a ship that recovered manned space craft during NASA's Mercury program. He left the Navy with the rank of lieutenant commander.

He joined General Dynamics, and spent much of his life overseas. "I spent six years in Egypt as director of marketing for the F-16. I was there when Sadat was killed in 1981. I was almost in the stands," he said, referring to the reviewing stands at the annual victory parade in Cairo where the Egyptian president was assassinated.

Mr. Cook said he had helped develop the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt. He also lived in Saudi Arabia, and "lost all of my belongings during the Iranian revolution in 1978."

His last assignment for General Dynamics was helping to coordinate the RAM (Rolling Airframe Missile) program for the United States, Germany, and Denmark. The anti-missile missile is now mounted on German and American war ships.

On his father's side of the family, Mr. Cook can trace his roots back to William Wells who settled in Southold in 1635. "He was the first sheriff in New York," he said. He said he could also include the Dominy family of East Hampton in his genealogy. But of all his roots and well-traveled roads, the ones that lead back to Montauk remain uppermost in his mind.

"I get the word 'Montauk' in the title of all my writings."



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Paul Cook penned his first potboiler, "Point of Entry — Montauk," after 22 years in the Navy and 23 years with General Dynamics.