



Philippine secretary of national defense talks with John Cooper, '36ba, U. S. Veterans Administration manager for islands, at military review in Manila.

Friend of the Philippines

When John Cooper accepted the job as manager of U. S. Veterans Administration in Manila, he also accepted an assignment as good-will ambassador for the U. S. to the youthful democracy.

By KAY COCHRAN

MANILA, P. I.

AN AMERICAN VISITOR to this capital city of one of the world's youngest republics can not fail to be impressed with the effort the Philippine Islands is making toward achieving mature independence and a working democracy. Many Americans are here encouraging the youthful democracy. And one I talked with is peculiarly fitted for his unofficial position as a representative of the American citizenry and his official position as manager of the U. S. Veterans Administration. He's John Cooper, '36ba, and he understands his opportunity to represent Americans to the Filipinos.

To people who have little opportunity to know Americans personally, he and his family are America. If the Coopers are kind, congenial, hospitable and eager to help, then, in Filipino eyes, so are other Americans.

Americans could wish for few better representatives. Born and reared in Wewoka, he attended school there and won the "Best Boy Scout in the Canadian Valley" award, which provided an expenses paid trip to England in 1929. He entered O.U. and earned a B.A. degree and worked toward a law degree. He returned home in 1938 to practice law. In 1940, he was swept up in preparations for war. He was called to active duty with the state's 45th National Guard Division. Later he transferred to the paratroops and launched a brilliant military record.

Participating in the African, Sicilian, Italian and European campaigns, he won the bronze star for heroism at Anzio, the silver star for his valor at the Battle of Bastogne as well as the Belgian government's Croix de Guerre, and the unit which he

commanded received the Presidential Unit Citation.

Wounded in action once, he left the service a lieutenant colonel.

In 1946 he received his first VA appointment and was assigned to Denver, where he received increasingly important posts until 1953 when he was assigned to Manila.

The Coopers live in Forbes Park, an area often called the "Beverly Hills of Manila." Their large home is furnished with quiet simplicity. On the walls hang several original paintings by noted Filipino artists.

Unlike most Filipino homes, even in Manila, the Cooper home has a laundry room complete with automatic washer. The kitchen is large and modern and equipped with the conveniences taken for granted by most American women but not by Filipinos.

Cooper's administrative responsibilities

are similar to those of VA managers in the United States. As in the states, the administration handles matters dealing with veterans of the United States armed forces and their descendants. Under supervision of the VA a new ten million dollar hospital has just been completed in Manila.

Cooper must often travel to the far parts of Luzon to investigate claims of a Spanish-American war veteran or one of his descendants. He often travels north of Manila into the Igorot or aborigine country. Though such trips are rarely dangerous, accidents occasionally happen.

As I sat in Cooper's home office a call came from the north. In a barrio (tiny native village) a native had gone berserk and shot and killed one of Cooper's men who was there for a routine investigation. It was the same sort of rare maniacal killing which sometimes happens on American streets.

More common excitement is that of fording a rapid mountain stream or hiking upland for two days to make necessary investigation of case claims and to talk with veterans who come under Cooper's administration. Cooper or his representatives sometimes stay in native huts. These huts are built on a framework of bamboo. The walls and roof are woven of nipa fiber from the nipa palm. Animals are kept under the house. The bath house is the nearest cold stream. The same stream probably serves as wash tub and water fountain.

Travel to these out of the way places is sometimes by dugout canoe with food and necessary materials covered with banana leaves to keep them dry. Cooper and his men may carry lunch with them, or they may rely on the food supply of their hosts. Rice is, of course, the staple food of the Filipino diet. Also included are a great many of the abundant fruits and vegetables.

Natives of the hill country at one time killed and ate the dogs which roam the country. However, the government recently made the eating of dog meat illegal.

Cooper confesses he has never eaten Balut, a Filipino delicacy. He really can't be blamed, for this is a food which would not appeal to most Americans. The Balut is a duck egg which has been incubated for seventeen days and is then hardboiled and eaten in its embryonic form.

Most harrowing part of his job, Cooper confesses, is the social life. The Manila social whirl is wonderful if you can stand it, he says. Alice Knight Cooper, '37ba, seems to be standing it very well. More and more the government as well as American business investigate wives before send-

ing the husbands abroad. Alice Cooper would pass any such test. She knows just the right word or action to make everything run smoothly whether she is entertaining twelve students from the University of Oklahoma, the American ambassador, or the undersecretary of the Philippine government.

The five Cooper children have an opportunity to participate in a life which is a culmination of the blending of East and West. Filipinos are trying very hard to copy American modes of life. But the influence of the past is still much in evidence.

Almost all children of the various foreign embassy officials stationed in Manila attend the "American School." Twenty-two students are in ten-year-old Melanie Cooper's sixth grade class, and nineteen countries are represented.

Cooper says this has developed in his children a remarkable cosmopolitan air and an acceptance of things he would have thought quite unusual when he was a boy in Wewoka.

He illustrated his point: "In 1955, I made a business trip to Washington, D. C., and arranged to go through Europe so I would completely circle the world before returning to Manila. This around the world trek, I sprang as a surprise one evening at the dinner table. Melanie said, 'So what, he's just going around the world. Pass the potatoes.'"

The Coopers expect to send each of their youngsters to O.U. for at least two years. Cynthia, 16, is an attractive young woman in senior high school. Cynthia, Melanie,

Bobby, 7, Johnny, 6, and Richard Oliver, 5, are all doing their bit as American ambassadors by giving the Filipino an idea of the fresh vivacity that is typical of American young people.

Cooper drives to work every morning in the mass hysteria that is Manila traffic. Side by side with imported American cars run the tiny German and English cars. But Manila traffic is entirely dominated by the huge square buses with wooden bench seats and painted in a dozen different color schemes.

Jeepneys made from war surplus jeeps and painted in hundreds of colors, from reds and blacks to yellow and fuchsia and purple, dart in and out of the traffic like tiny bugs, leaving only a few inches of clearance between nearby vehicles.

Eighty percent of the population is unemployed, Cooper told us. In an effort to provide work for more people, the Filipinos have put in stop lights but have left traffic cops nearby.

One of the sights of downtown Manila is a small squatter's stall built in the ruins of a pre-war building. Nearby is a new glass and steel structured skyscraper. This is the Filipino's reminder of war. This is why he feels a need for democracy.

"Once in the Philippines," Cooper says, "you live and breathe the feeling that democracy must succeed."

By their actions and example, the Cooper family is offering their Filipino counterparts evidence of the friendly interest the people of the U. S. hold for the success of the infant democracy.



John Cooper, '36ba, Mrs. Alice Knight Cooper, '37ba, and their five children at the Manila airport prepare for their trip to the U. S. last March. The Coopers say children will all attend O. U.