

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Benjamin K. Jones '44
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: How is it in 1939, when you were thinking about colleges, that you decided to consider Dartmouth? Was there a family connection here? Or how was it that you knew about Dartmouth?

JONES: Well, when my father died, I was around 12 years old and a family across the street virtually adopted me. And one of the boys was in the Class of '40. And he was on the hockey team, and I thought I was a good hockey player, and I was very interested in following in his steps. And whenever there was a Dartmouth game in our area, we would always go see it. I never applied to any other school. Never even occurred to me to look elsewhere.

DONIN: Did you actually come up and look at it before you applied?

JONES: I had been here to see hockey games. And I did a lot of skiing in this general area when skiing was done by rope tows. And I can't believe that I didn't even look elsewhere. Today that would have been very risky.

DONIN: That was the trend then. A lot of people came here, having not even laid eyes on the place.

JONES: Well, there were eight of us in our class in high school that came up here, and I suppose half of them had never been here before.

DONIN: Eight of your classmates came to Dartmouth? Where were you in high school?

DONIN: Columbia High in Maplewood, New Jersey.

DONIN: My goodness. So you weren't alone anyway. So were you one of these Dartmouth types that embraced the outdoors? I mean, was that what its appeal was?

JONES: Yes, to a large extent. I was a Chubber.

DONIN: Oh, you were a Chubber.

JONES: We did the canoe trips, and I liked to be in the outdoors. I liked to do hunting and skiing. As I say, I thought I was a football player 'til I got up here. And I thought I was a hockey player 'til I got up here. [Laughter] Neither of which panned out.

DONIN: Were you able to do any of that in intramurals?

JONES: Yes, yes. We did some of that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: It was just the right school for me at the right time. And it turned out to be for most of the people—because I kept in touch with our class; I've been the head agent for the last almost 40 years.

DONIN: Wow.

JONES: And I keep in touch with everybody. And I think that Dartmouth was just right for who we were at that time.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: Now some people didn't like it, and they grouched about the fact that it was so remote because we didn't have all this stuff you've got today. We didn't have all the theaters and people coming in to see. In the middle of winter, nobody came to see us.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: And it was hard to get out of here. But it was perfect for us then.

DONIN: And you guys were able to at least have the idyllic freshman year without it being interrupted by the war.

JONES: Our whole freshman year was pretty much war-free. I'd been up in Canada. I was working as a counselor up there, and of course the war affected my Canadian friends in 1939.

DONIN: Yes.

JONES: In fact I even tried to join the Canadian Army, but my mother wouldn't let me. [Laughter] So when I got back to the States, it was business as usual. We knew a war was going on, but I don't think

any of us were too preoccupied by it. Except we had to register for the draft, and that caught our attention. But again, we were in school, and had a deferment.

DONIN: Was there lots of discussion about, you know, between the sort of interventionists versus the isolationists here? I mean was that a big issue?

JONES: Not in my lifetime. I don't know. I don't think we got into that too much. That wasn't—I certainly didn't get into it.

DONIN: Well, as freshman you're preoccupied.

JONES: Yes, you're trying to pass your courses. You're trying to pay for your schooling and work. It was not.... Some, I think, paid a lot of attention to it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: I'm sure that the parents of the students here paid a lot of attention to it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: That was, I think, something that, you know, every family normally would be terribly concerned about but I don't know that we were.

DONIN: And the upperclassmen, I assume, also were probably more focused on it.

JONES: Yes. In the fraternities and in some of our classes, guys would stand up and say this is—I'm off to the Navy or to the Marines or to wherever, whatever unit they'd been assigned or something. Or their draft number had come up and then you're gone. So the numbers started to drift down pretty quick.

DONIN: The first year, though, you were able to sort of have a traditional undergraduate—

JONES: As far as I knew, it was a traditional, standard. Everybody—We didn't go to school in the summer....

DONIN: Right.

JONES: In that summer at the end of '41. Well, yes. But we did accelerate in the next years. Yes, we went year round. And it was lucky I did because I got enough credits, and a lot of people did, enough credits between what we did here in Hanover plus what we did in the service to get our degree. Because there's no way I could have ever come back. I was married. I didn't have any money, and there was no way I could come back up here. But I had enough, and Dean Neidlinger sent me a nice letter along with my diploma.

DONIN: This was after you'd left to join the service.

JONES: It was after I'd come back. The service was over, and I was back in the States. And the question came up, well, what do I do about my degree?

DONIN: I see.

JONES: Because, you know, we didn't graduate. We didn't have any graduation ceremony as all the fellows before me have told you. The only class in the history of Dartmouth never to have had a formal graduation.

DONIN: So when did you actually leave here?

JONES: I left here—I went into the service in October of '42. And through a series of delays—I can't even tell you—I went in over Christmas. Right between Christmas and New Year's.

DONIN: Of your sophomore year.

JONES: Probably '42. Well, whatever it was. But we had sped up, so I was actually into my junior year, pretty well into it.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

JONES: And I think by the end of '42, I had almost the same equivalents as—

DONIN: Oh, as a junior.

JONES: As a junior.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Yes, because you'd been here for two summers already.

JONES: Right.

DONIN: Right. What were you majoring in?

JONES: Economics.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. And were you also working here while you were in....

JONES: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

DONIN: What was your job?

JONES: Well, it started out—The first job I had was at the Indian Bowl, and that's long since gone, but a fellow—the same fellow that played hockey up here—introduced me to the owner, a fellow by the name of Saya. And we got along just fine. And he started me out in the back as a dishwasher. And I learned the restaurant business from the back to the front because I finally ended up in the cashier's spot. But I went through all the steps. Made the sandwiches, waited on tables, did everything.

DONIN: Hopefully got some free meals, too.

JONES: If it covered the period of time when we were actually there, he would give us a free meal.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

JONES: But he would watch what we ate. It wasn't these big fancy meals, believe me. Bruno Saya was a good businessman.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

JONES: A good man. He took care of the people who worked for him.

DONIN: Great. And employed a lot of students probably.

JONES: Yes. Well, sure. It was one of the better jobs. My roommate worked at Clark School, and, you know, that required him to—you know it was.... I lived in New Hampshire Hall, so for me to work was just a block away.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: And he was good about if you had exams or anything else. I mean he was good about people shift in and move out.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So what were your impressions of President Hopkins? Did you ever have any personal interaction with him?

JONES: No, not directly. He was revered. He was like a... I don't know. I can't describe it. But everybody had very good feelings about him. And whenever he talked to us as a group, we paid a lot of attention to what he said. Very—I mean we don't have people today—maybe we do, but I don't know where they are in public or private life—that were statesmen, and this guy was a statesman. He thought good thoughts. He said what he believed. He backed it up with his actions.

DONIN: Did he urge your class to try and complete their education before you enlisted?

JONES: Well, we didn't have any choice. Nobody had a choice. He would have loved to have everybody stay here and pay their dues and go to college but...

DONIN: What I'm thinking of is after Pearl Harbor, a lot of people wanted to go off and enlist right away.

JONES: Well, a lot of people enlisted right away.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: Of course. That was—if they could. I tried to get into the Air Force right away. But I kept flunking because my eyes weren't good enough. I couldn't pass the physical, and then I ate carrots. [Laughter] A whole bunch of junk to try and do it. And finally I just ran out of options because that's really what I wanted to do. And a lot of my friends—most of my friends wanted to become physicians, which a lot of people in our class did. Or get in the Naval Air Force or the Army Air Force or the Marine Air Force, something like that. As opposed to ending up as a rifleman in an infantry company, which I ended up doing because I couldn't physically or any other way get myself connected in areas of combat that I would have liked a lot better than where I ended up.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you were drafted?

JONES: No, I enlisted.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

JONES: I enlisted to beat the draft. The draft was hot on my back. And when I enlisted, I was told I could have another almost full semester up here, which I was able to get. Yes, as soon as you told people in the draft board in Maplewood, New Jersey, that you'd enlisted, they took you off their list. And then you went on the Army procurement list. And they decided when you would go in service rather than the draft. So it worked out.

DONIN: Well, it did allow a lot of you to get more—if not complete, at least get more credits.

JONES: Yes, you were able to buy a little time. Which I think was the grand scheme.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: Is I think the government wanted not to have a bunch of dummies around after the war was over.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: Not that they were counting on me to lead that charge. But that's what I think they were thinking about.

DONIN: And that's what some of the training that was going on here was meant to do, was to produce educated officers. I mean, they were taking classes here as well as military.

JONES: Well, that was the V-5 and V-7 group. My curriculum never changed. I didn't take any war classes or anything that would have helped me in the service.

DONIN: Right. I'm talking about the military training...

JONES: Those are government programs that came in here and they were not, you know, they were guys from other colleges, who had really no affinity for Dartmouth. Although some of them came on and stayed on and graduated, and we have them in our class.

DONIN: They did. And they played on sports teams here.

- JONES: On some of the sports teams, yes.
- DONIN: And they in fact were in some classes with some of the students, depending on....
- JONES: Yes, we had, before we left, we had some people in different classes that had come in under the V-12 and V-7.
- DONIN: Yes, they were just starting here I think in '42 or '43, when you guys were finishing up.
- JONES: We were just—yes. I think they were starting to come in in the middle of '42.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: I think so.
- DONIN: So what was your social group here? Was it all the Outing Club kind of people? Or was it dormitories or—your dormitory? Or was it—
- JONES: Well, I think my freshman year I really don't remember a lot of social activity except the people who lived in New Hampshire Hall.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: And, as I say, I tried out for the sports teams, and I was working. And then to my horror, I ended up on a warning list because I ended up with a 1.4 average, which drove my mother and everybody in my family nuts. But I came from a public high school. And a lot of the people here had come from prep schools where lectures and taking notes and taking exams in like the... like the college environment, it had prepared them much better than I had. I didn't know how to take a note. But I found out in a hurry. And so I went more to the books and finally got a gentleman's average out of the College.
- DONIN: In those days was there someone you could turn to, to sort of mentor you and help you along when you were struggling with grades? I mean, who did you go to for guidance?

JONES: Well, my roommate was a help because he'd been in a private school before he came here. And there were a couple of guys down the hall that helped me. But basically it was a question of priority. I didn't have studies as a high priority. They were maybe fifth? [Laughter] I didn't know what the other priorities were, but this was not a high priority for me. But that warning turned it out to be a high priority. So I kind of reversed things. Because I wasn't able to get on the various teams that I liked to, I became what they called a heeler, and we worked for the DCAC—the Dartmouth [College] Athletic Council—and we were doing the grunt work for the managers of the various teams. We'd do hockey and football and baseball and soccer and tennis and all of the things were there. And I took that on as a—got very seriously involved in it. And ended up as football manager.

DONIN: Wow.

JONES: Yes, which is the one I really wanted. So that became my really only preoccupation except getting those grades back up.

DONIN: In those days, didn't you have a legendary coach here? Was it Tuss McLaughry?

JONES: Oh, yes. Dear, dear guy. One of the best. His son is in our class.

DONIN: Right, Bob's father.

JONES: Sure.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: Tuss was the coach when I was the manager. And we had a lot of fun together.

DONIN: Must have been a great experience.

JONES: Oh, yes. I mean he was like a father figure to those ballplayers, and we had a good team. There was no nonsense. That class of '40 came in under Earl Blaik. And Blaik had recruited some of the best prep school and high school players that you could bring together. Then when Tuss took over—he'd been at Brown, and then he came up here when Blaik went to West Point—some of the players went with him. But others stayed right here. And he was magnificent.

DONIN: He was here for quite a while.

JONES: Yes, he was.

DONIN: Through the '50s sometime I think.

JONES: Yes. And a smart football man who knew what was going on. And was good to work with because sometimes the managers, at least at my time, had quite a lot of responsibility. You know, you had to get all the equipment there and all the—everything that had to do with a game; not only here but on the road. And to get it all coordinated and make sure that everybody's helmet was there at his locker when he wanted it. And so forth.

DONIN: Did you have any helpers yourself?

JONES: Oh, sure. We had all the guys who'd been trying, who were doing like me, trying to get my job.

DONIN: Oh, heelers, heelers, yes.

JONES: So the heelers were right behind us.

DONIN: But that teaches you a great set of skills.

JONES: Oh, yes. Oh, no question about it. I learned a lot about trying to be patient and understanding and how to get out of tight jams, particularly when the right equipment wasn't at the right spot at the exact instant. Because football players are high maintenance guys. They just are—some aren't. But most of them are there, and they've got a tough job, and they want to do well, and they don't want to be distracted because the manager forgot to do what he was supposed to do.

DONIN: Were sports impacted by the war in terms of, I don't know, gas rationing and all that kind of stuff? You were able to travel whenever you need to travel?

JONES: Well, while I was here, I don't recall any travel impairment. Our schedule was completed as it was supposed to be. I don't recall any impairment there. Because later on I'm sure it was terrible. Well, there was gas rationing and every kind of rationing going. So I would think after '42 I don't know what happened. I wasn't around.

- DONIN: Did you consider the quality of your education to be good? From your vantage point as an undergraduate.
- JONES: In retrospect or at the time? [Laughter] Because those are two different answers. In retrospect it was terrific. It was just terrific. It just broadened my view. I met some tremendous people that have been lifelong friends. And got into situations that, you know, I had to kind of work my way out of and was exposed to a lot of things that heretofore I had not been exposed to. And how do you manage it? You know, how do you manage all of the things that go on? I had to manage money right off the bat, you know, for the first time I really had to manage it. We had to manage it because that's what it was. And my mother could—it was a tremendous sacrifice. I didn't realize what a sacrifice it was to get me up here. But it was and it worked.
- DONIN: How about the sort of splintering of the class that took place because you were all leaving at different times?
- JONES: That was just out of control. I mean nobody—You just didn't know. My roommate was sitting there one day, and somebody came in and said, "They want you up at the Dartmouth office."
- DONIN: The dean's office or Parkhurst.
- JONES: Parkhurst or something like that. So he goes up, and he comes back ashen-faced. He says, "I've got two weeks to get ready, and I'm gone."
- DONIN: Oh....
- JONES: So those things were—You just couldn't tell. And if you were gone for Christmas or something like that and came back, you didn't know whether the guys were going to be there or not.
- DONIN: Who would be there, yes.
- JONES: Well, remember our class was.... I'd say '40, I'd say all those classes in the early '40s were just decimated.
- DONIN: Yes.
- JONES: And the relationships were broken before they were ever...in a lot of ways ever got started.

- DONIN: And of course you missed out on a lot of the sort of traditions tied into...
- JONES: Oh, yes, all of them.
- DONIN: Graduation.
- JONES: Yes. Leading up to graduation. Some of it was made up, though. I think they'll all tell you, in the summertime. The going year round at Dartmouth turned out to be a great thing. It was tough financially because I earned money in the summer. But in retrospect the most beautiful part of Hanover's the summer.
- DONIN: Of course. Yes.
- JONES: You're not slopping through snow and freezing yourself to death and all that. I mean it was beautiful. And I've wondered always since then—and I've been on college boards and raised it up many times—why not go year round?
- DONIN: Yes.
- JONES: What is possibly gained by yanking you out in the summer? Financially, of course, there is a difference. It makes it a chance to get out and make some money. But by cutting it short.... I don't know, we had a good time those summers. We had a great time.
- DONIN: Well, especially Outing Club activities.
- JONES: Yes, oh, yes. There was everything. We weren't allowed to have a car up here, which was tough.
- DONIN: How'd you get around? Hitchhiking, I guess.
- JONES: Oh, hitchhiking continuously.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: My roommate lived over—His family had a home over in Rutland. And they were in Florida. So it was open house.
- DONIN: Oh, my!

- JONES: We transported ourselves frequently to there. And an upperclassmen got a motorcycle, and I bought half interest in it. And so he could have it. And I guess the rules were I couldn't. But anyway, I used it anyway. So it worked out pretty well.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: It was a lot of improvisation and a lot of things that you'd like to do, but you just couldn't.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: So it was a good learning experience.
- DONIN: Was the class unity or sense of identity impacted by all this coming and going?
- JONES: I don't think at the time we thought about it. I don't think it was. But later on we realized it. And I think that's what's set the class of '44 completely apart from all other classes that I know anything about. Certainly all the classes that preceded us. This school, for example, had seven of our graduates that were integral parts of the Dartmouth administration, all the way down from chairman of the board of the trustees, the provost. There were seven of them worked full time for the college. We have more people living in this immediate area in our class than any other class alone.
- DONIN: Oh, isn't that interesting.
- JONES: They bonded probably but didn't know it.
- DONIN: Right. Until later.
- JONES: I said they. I mean we bonded and didn't know it.
- DONIN: Right, right.
- JONES: And so, when generosity... I remember meetings where different guys would stand up and say, "Look, I owe this college something for something I've done in the past." I'm just sitting there. I didn't have enough money to get generous with the school. And it was just amazing to hear them talk; and all of a sudden, people would just start to come together.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JONES: You'll find terrific— You'll find more loyalty to the class of '44, by far, then you'll find to Dartmouth. By far!

DONIN: Oh, to the class itself.

JONES: To the class itself.

DONIN: Oh, that's interesting.

JONES: I just can't describe it. But this college and the faculty over a period of years has done things that individuals in our class find totally intolerable.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

JONES: Wherever would they get that idea? Why would they allow this? Why in the— So to try to build a relationship involving Dartmouth, I was a fundraiser. I couldn't do it. But by talking about the class, it's a whole different game. We're talking now about our 65th reunion gift. I just came from that—and again I have to remind them: this is the great class of 1944's effort. I don't sit there saying that Dartmouth College needs it or the faculty needs it. Because they do things that you sit there and you say, Why? Why do you do it that way? That makes no sense. But that's their business. And I think you'll find all of them, they really like this class. And I remember John Berry at one of our mini-reunions—I guess getting ready for maybe our tenth or 15th or 20th, he spoke for about ten minutes. And not everybody liked John Berry. But after that talk, everybody realized, why, here's a guy who has the money. He's putting it right on the line. He believes in this college and I think probably more than anybody else – He isn't the only one. We've got others that have been just tremendous: Walter Burke. I mean, there's just nobody like him. And I could name 20 that are in that general category who have done very well and who want to see good things happen to young people coming along like happened to us. And I think the kids coming through – Nobody quarrels with the kids. You look at the group of them and you figure, well, diversity is certainly present at Dartmouth College. And if diversity is going to solve some of this world's problems, well, that's good; I hope it does.

- DONIN: And many also say that the standards for admission here now are so high that –
- JONES: Well, you can't get in. None of— There's not one guy of our eight could have probably gotten into Dartmouth College under any set of circumstances. The rest of us were just... Dartmouth wouldn't look at me today. Are you kidding? [Laughter] Not a chance.
- DONIN: Right. And some of your classmates, though, actually went off and served and then came back to graduate, so they were—
- JONES: Well, they had to; they didn't have enough points.
- DONIN: Right.
- JONES: And I don't think anybody came back here— Well, nobody I knew came back here voluntarily. They came back because they didn't have enough accumulated points between what they'd earned while they were here on campus and what credit they gave them for whatever courses they got in service. And so they had to come back or not get a degree.
- DONIN: But of course the advantage of coming back is—although I suppose you could go to any university or college—was that the GI Bill kicked in.
- JONES: Well, sure. But if I lived in California and I had a semester left or two semesters left, why would I come back here?
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- JONES: And that affected our class because we have a lot of people who did not come back to graduate.
- DONIN: Right. They got their degrees someplace else.
- JONES: Yes, and then they became affiliated with that school.
- DONIN: Right.
- JONES: And they think of themselves as a U-Mass graduate or, you know, Gonzaga or something. Some other school.
- DONIN: Right. But nonetheless they're still considered part of your class.

JONES: Oh, yes. We count them. And some of them participate; some of them are very generous. Some of them aren't.

DONIN: Right.

JONES: But I can understand that.

DONIN: And that's your challenge when you're fundraising.

JONES: Yes, yes.

[End of Interview]