

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Stephen Tate '44
By Mary Stelle Donin
October 15, 2008

DONIN: How is it you chose Dartmouth? Was there a family connection here before you came?

TATE: None.

DONIN: None?

TATE: Well, we summered on Lake Winnepesaukee, which is nearby. And I—My parents wanted me to see Dartmouth, and I fell in love with it immediately and decided to go there. It's the only place I ever applied to.

DONIN: Had you heard about it from any classmates or anything? I mean, did you know much about it?

TATE: We had one or two people who lived in our small town in New Jersey who had gone there.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: And they thought it was a good school.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Were you sort of an outdoorsy kind of person growing up? I mean did that—Is that what appealed to you about Dartmouth? Was it the outdoorsy stuff or—

TATE: Oh, yes. I think so.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: I think very much so.

DONIN: Did you have any classmates in your high school coming with you at the same time?

TATE: No, no. Nobody. That was Depression years. Nobody could afford college. I was one of maybe two or three people in my high school,

which is over a thousand, that were able to—that could afford to go to college.

DONIN: Right, right. Yes, I think a lot of the students here were on scholarship back then, even then.

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: So do you remember what it was like coming here as a brand-new freshman and having to wear the beanie and all that kind of thing? Do you remember any of those experiences?

TATE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Can you describe some of your first-year experiences before the world was turned upside down by the war?

TATE: Yes. I think.... There was the freshman rush. Now that occurred on the huge—

DONIN: Was it the Green?

TATE: Green.

DONIN: Yes, on the Green.

TATE: Yes. Between Baker Library and the Hanover Inn.

DONIN: Right, right.

TATE: And there was—I can't remember the details of it, but there was a contest who could carry the—

DONIN: Oh, yes.

TATE: —ball across to the other side. They were on the—The sophomores and upperclassmen were on the library end.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: And we were on the Hanover Inn end. And we came together. And I think we managed to get the ball across the opposite end.

DONIN: That's pretty good.

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Now were you an obedient freshman, and did you wear your beanie and be obedient to the upperclassmen when they asked you to, you know, move furniture and do all those other things?

TATE: I was pretty cooperative.

DONIN: Yes? Yes. I gather there was a bunch of rules that they laid out for the freshmen to live by. Let's see. Oh yes, here are the rules that were outlined in the Dartmouth when you got there in 1940. "Beanies must be worn at all times when outdoors. Freshmen cannot wear any prep school insignia of any kind." In those days I guess there were a lot of boys—men—who were there from prep schools as opposed to public high schools.

TATE: The College rule was 50-50.

DONIN: Oh, was it? Uh-huh.

TATE: They had—Every class had approximately 50 percent from private schools and 50 percent from high schools.

DONIN: Yes, yes. "The freshmen are confined to the back seats in the Nugget?" Did you have to sit in the rear of the Nugget when you went to the movies?

TATE: I don't recall that.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: The Nugget was the cinema.

DONIN: Right, the movie theater. It's still going. It's in a different place but it's still there in Hanover.

TATE: Yes, it used to be right across from the Inn, there was a little...

DONIN: There was that alleyway, down that alleyway.

TATE: Alleyway, yes.

DONIN: "Freshmen must sit in exclusive cheering section at the football games."

TATE: I do recall something of that. Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Somebody explained to me that the purpose for that was to provide all you newcomers an opportunity to sort of bond as you were all sitting there at the game.

TATE: Well, that may have been it.

DONIN: You didn't know that. [Laughter]

TATE: No.

DONIN: "And freshmen are expected to attend all the rallies." I assume that meant the pep rallies before the games?

TATE: I think that's right.

DONIN: Before the football games.

TATE: I guess that's right.

DONIN: Now speaking of football, wasn't that fall that you were there as freshmen, wasn't that the famous football game against Cornell where there was a fifth down that....

TATE: Fifth down game.

DONIN: Where they originally were determined to be the winners. But then they looked at the film and gave it to Dartmouth, I gather. Gave the win to Dartmouth.

TATE: That was the weekend when I was slated to run in the IC-4A cross-country race in Manhattan.

DONIN: Oh!

TATE: So I didn't go to the game.

DONIN: Right.

TATE: And during that Saturday afternoon, we got on a bus and started for New York.

DONIN: So you missed the big game.

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: But you heard about it I'm sure afterwards.

TATE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Yes. That fall term you had there, actually your whole first year, was a pretty traditional undergraduate experience for you because the US was not yet involved in the war.

TATE: That's right.

DONIN: Did you feel like you had a pretty, you know, a pretty typical undergraduate first year at Dartmouth?

TATE: That's the way they made it seem.

DONIN: Yes, yes. And being part of a sports team must have introduced you to a circle of close friends right away. I mean, they must have become good friends, your teammates.

TATE: Oh, yes. Yes.

DONIN: And was it difficult being an athlete and also trying to keep up with your studies?

TATE: Not for me it wasn't.

DONIN: No? You felt pretty well prepared for Dartmouth when you got there in terms of academics.

TATE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. You didn't find the classes too difficult.

TATE: I was the smartest guy in my high school class.

DONIN: Okay. So there was no problem there.

- TATE: No.
- DONIN: Were there particular teachers that made a real impression on you when you first got there? Did you have a favorite teacher or someone that you were particularly—
- TATE: Not really. My German teacher I sort of thought was a bundes... you know, that he was a real Nazi type. But I got along with him.
- DONIN: What was your—Were you thinking about a major at that point, when you were a freshman?
- TATE: Oh, yes. I intended to be an English major, and I became one.
- DONIN: Uh-huh. So you must have had some of the better-known English professors that people talk about.
- TATE: Yes.
- DONIN: What was dormitory life like? Did you enjoy it?
- TATE: Ah yes. I did.
- DONIN: Let's see what dormitory were you assigned to? You were in 113 New Hampshire Hall.
- TATE: New Hampshire Hall. Right.
- DONIN: Did you have a good roommate, someone that you became close to?
- TATE: No. [Laughter]
- DONIN: Oh, dear.
- TATE: He was from Long Island. He was not a guy I particularly liked. But that's the way things are.
- DONIN: So by your sophomore year, you had changed roommates I assume.
- TATE: I'm trying to think what happened sophomore year. No, he was—he got into a fraternity. You couldn't be in a fraternity freshman

year. So sophomore year was when they...and he got in immediately. I don't know why.

DONIN: That's when that whole rush thing goes on, right, when you rush the fraternities?

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: In sophomore fall, right?

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: That was when they first could go out and get you.

DONIN: Yes, yes. Did you rush the fraternities? Did you join one?

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: I was Sigma Phi Epsilon.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Right.

TATE: And I notice that their fraternity house is turned over to... It's right across the street from Mary Hitchcock.

DONIN: Oh, is it? What is it now? It's no longer a fraternity house then.

TATE: That's right. I don't know what it is.

DONIN: Did it deactivate here at Dartmouth? Is that what happened to it?

TATE: I kind of think so.

DONIN: So were you an active member of your fraternity? Did you get involved with it a lot?

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Did you live there ever?

TATE: I lived in the fraternity, yes. I can't remember when, but I did.

DONIN: Right, right. What would you say was your most important social group while you were there at the college? Was it your cross-country team or was it your fraternity brothers?

TATE: I suppose the fraternity brothers.

DONIN: Was it? Yes. So that's where all your social life took place.

TATE: Pretty much.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And did you get involved in the road trips to all the women's colleges nearby?

TATE: No, I went on one or two of them.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: But I can't remember where we went.

DONIN: Right. Well, you must have had to give up quite a bit of your time for the track team, I would assume. Training and—

TATE: Yes. Oh, yes.

DONIN: Training and traveling and everything.

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Yes.

TATE: The indoor track was in the sports facility.

DONIN: Right.

TATE: And Glenn Cunningham had run the fastest indoor mile in American history on that track.

DONIN: Wow!

TATE: Which was quite notable.

DONIN: Now was the indoor track, was that Leverone Fieldhouse? Did that exist in those days, Leverone? I don't know. I don't remember if it was built by then.

TATE: Well, when you go down past the Inn—

DONIN: Yes, down Wheelock Street.

TATE: And pass New Hampshire Hall where I was. And you pass that.

DONIN: Yes.

TATE: You came to the—

DONIN: To the gym.

TATE: Gym on the right.

DONIN: Yes.

TATE: And it was underneath all of that the track ran.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

TATE: It ran for more than one building.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: And it was quite a nice big oval.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: Of maybe half a mile.

DONIN: Uh-huh. I see. Right. So that's where you ran in the winter. What are your memories of where you were on December 7, 1941?

TATE: I don't know what you call a terribly religious person. But we went to... I became interested in a little area across the river in Vermont called Beaver Meadow.

DONIN: Oh, yes!

- TATE: And Beaver Meadow was a part of Norwich, the westerly end of Norwich. And I was an Episcopalian and quite close to... We called them for the first time—you know we attended a low church in New Jersey. But this was high church stuff. You called him Father Hodder. Father Hodder not only ran the Episcopal Church in Hanover, but also the little chapel in Beaver Meadow.
- DONIN: Which is a really sweet little building.
- TATE: And I got to going with him every Sunday. And every fourth Sunday we would have a—I think we only went once a month. And we'd have a service out there. And I got to know a lot of the people who lived out there who only came to that one church. We used to go out there. And when on December 7th was a Sunday. And on the afternoon of December 7th, we were on the way back in—it was quite a drive—the way back in, I heard on the news that the Congress was meeting, and that we were going to be in the war. That's how I found out about it.
- DONIN: Wow! Now speaking of church and such, you were active in the Dartmouth Christian Union, weren't you?
- TATE: DCU.
- DONIN: DCU. What exactly did the DCU do?
- TATE: I've sort of forgotten but I think that... Well, it's interesting to note, but there was a real movement toward pacifism at the college. And if you were a real DCUer, you were against the war. And so I suppose I was to a certain extent, but not that much.
- DONIN: I think they did quite a bit of community service. Didn't you do sort of volunteer work outside the college?
- TATE: I think some elements of it did, yes.
- DONIN: So did you have friends in the DCU? Is that what inspired you to join it? Or was it because you were somewhat of a pacifist?
- TATE: Well, I was inclined to be a pacifist. But I think I was more in the DCU because it was sort of the thing to do.
- DONIN: I think you were also in the Forensic Union. Do you remember that, your work in the Forensic Union?

- TATE: Oh yes, I was a debater.
- DONIN: So was that something that you—a skill that you had developed in high school first?
- TATE: I think so. I was on the debating team.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- TATE: And I was very—I didn't do too well at it because I was so shy. I was a very shy guy.
- DONIN: Was that something—Do you think joining the debate team is a good way to overcome shyness because you're forced to speak in public.
- TATE: Well, that was my theory. And I think it helped.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- TATE: I don't think I would have been an effective lawyer if I stayed as shy as I was.
- DONIN: Right. It's a good set of skills you learn in debate. Let's talk about—
- TATE: The point being that you can take either side of an issue and go right at it.
- DONIN: Exactly. You can see both sides. So were athletes considered to be big men on campus? You were a varsity athlete.
- TATE: A BMOC was a big thing on campus. But I wasn't one of them.
- DONIN: But you were an athlete, a varsity athlete. Didn't you win letters?
- TATE: You won letters and numerals and that sort of thing but that's all.
- DONIN: Didn't that raise your profile in the eyes of your classmates to be athlete?
- TATE: You'd have to ask them. [Laughter]
- DONIN: So were you able to finish up before you did your military service, or was it interrupted?

- TATE: Well, at the end of sophomore year, I guess it is— Understand that as soon as we were in the war, why then there were no more summers; we just stayed working through. I've sort of lost my train of thought.
- DONIN: Lets go back to what the schedule was like. After Pearl Harbor happened in December of 1941, pretty soon after that President Hopkins announced that the college was going to be running fulltime, year-round. So that you would have to stay there over the summer. In addition to that, my understanding is they accelerated a lot of the classes which was going to enable people to graduate sooner.
- TATE: Right.
- DONIN: So that they could sign up to do their military service. So members of your class...
- TATE: That didn't apply to our class.
- DONIN: It didn't apply. So you were able to go year-round and finish up. It seems like a lot of your classmates finished up in December of 1943 because of the accelerated classes and the schedule of going year-round. So were you able to get your diploma before you did your military service?
- TATE: No.
- DONIN: No. So you were—
- TATE: So I had to come back after the war and finish up. Which I did.
- DONIN: Right. So your war service went from the end of 1943 through 1946. And you were in the infantry? You were a captain in the infantry in the Pacific?
- TATE: Right.
- DONIN: Is that right? So that means you were in the Army. Is that right? You were in the Army?
- TATE: That's what the infantry is.

DONIN: Right. Okay. So it looks to me like you may have left in December of 1943.

TATE: I thought it was a bit earlier than that.

DONIN: Earlier?

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. So you went and did your service. And then came back to Dartmouth.

TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And at that point, of course, you were able to go on the GI Bill to have your education paid for.

TATE: I never paid another nickel for education.

DONIN: After your service. Well, that's the way it should be, considering what you all did. So what was it like coming after... What was it like coming back to school as an undergraduate after your years of military service in the Pacific?

TATE: Oh, I thought it was great.

DONIN: Was it? You were happy to be there.

TATE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Yes. Do you think you were a different kind of student after your service?

TATE: I worked much harder.

DONIN: And did you know what you were planning to do at that point after you finished your education?

TATE: No, I decided I was going to law school.

DONIN: Now when did you decide that, during your—

TATE: During that one term that I had to finish up.

- DONIN: Uh-huh. Did you have a professor that was sort of advising you about what you should do with your career?
- TATE: Yes, I think I got—it was that debating guy that was... And I was a very successful debater by the time war was over.
- DONIN: Uh-huh! So you'd come out of your shell a little bit. You weren't so shy.
- TATE: That's right.
- DONIN: Great. And he advised you that maybe you should think about going to law school?
- TATE: When you're in that position and you know that all your education is going to be paid for by the government, you figure out ways of making it last. And that was why I went to law school. I never would have gone to law school in civilian life.
- DONIN: But it was a good choice for you.
- TATE: Seems to have worked out that way.
- DONIN: Yes. So you were there for one term when you got back?
- TATE: Yes. I got back in the fall, and I finished up. And I never went to a graduation because the graduations were in the spring, and I got out in February.
- DONIN: Right. So they probably just mailed your diploma to you.
- TATE: Right.
- DONIN: I think your class—the class of '44—never got a ceremony at all. There was no ceremony.
- TATE: No.
- DONIN: And you just all graduated.
- TATE: No, if you happened to have enough terms to keep you going 'til spring, then you had a graduation in the spring.
- DONIN: With a different class, though, not with your class.

TATE: It was sort of a combined thing, yes.

DONIN: Right.

TATE: I don't know that they announced it as a combined thing.

DONIN: So when you returned in 1946, the college must have been a very different kind of place.

TATE: Yes. They'd had the military there.

DONIN: Right.

TATE: And so it was a little different. But I think they were intent on bringing it back to normalcy as soon as possible. And that was the feeling we got when we were back.

DONIN: Yes. And of course you came back to a different president of the college than you'd had when you'd had when you were there before the war. It was John Sloan Dickey who was the president when you returned.

TATE: I guess that's right.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

TATE: You know, you have a— You're sort of trained to have a higher regard for the president of the college. Hoppy was a guy whom we all kind of revered.

DONIN: And he was retired by the time you got back then and John Dickey was there in his place as the next president.

TATE: I guess that's right.

DONIN: So do you think that all this sort of coming and going of the class of 1944, so many people leaving at different times to start their military service and not having a graduation ceremony and missing out on a lot of those college traditions that are associated with graduation. Do you think that impacted your feeling of belonging to a class?

TATE: No. It made you much more aware of it.

- DONIN: It never occurred to you to change your class affiliation and graduate with a different class?
- TATE: No.
- DONIN: Has your class been able to maintain a sense of identity since graduation? Has it been a close-knit kind of class?
- TATE: Oh, yes. More so I think than if we had graduated in peacetime. No, I think when a bunch of your class has been killed in a war, you sort of hunker up, and you're more identified with it.
- DONIN: Right.
- TATE: You think of the guys that are dead and so forth.
- DONIN: What did you think of the quality of the teaching that you received there, the quality of the education you received at Dartmouth?
- TATE: Well, I thought it was good. I don't know—I didn't have anything to compare it with. So you get a lot of instruction in the Army, but it's not from people who are trained in education. I enjoyed instructing in the Army. I did a lot of teaching in the Army.
- DONIN: Did you! What were you teaching them?
- TATE: Infantry tactics and so forth.
- DONIN: That was part of the role of a captain, I guess, was to teach.
- TATE: Well, not any captain. Captain traditionally is the head of a company.
- DONIN: When you came back after your service, where did you live on campus? Were you back in a dormitory?
- TATE: I was on the complete opposite of campus. I can't remember the name of the dorm.
- DONIN: Uh-huh. But they still put you in a dorm.
- TATE: Yes.

DONIN: Did you feel that you were treated differently or looked up to by the civilians, once you returned to campus after your service?

TATE: Hell no!

DONIN: No? But you were an older, more mature, experienced—

TATE: Older, yes.

DONIN: —veteran who had served his country. But they didn't pay you any respect for that?

TATE: I don't think so.

DONIN: You weren't aware of it anyway. Now did you have a sense of sort of urgency about finishing up when you got back?

TATE: Sure. I wanted to finish up and get on with it.

DONIN: So you moved down to Cambridge, Mass., to go to law school.

TATE: Right.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

TATE: With two other guys in my class.

DONIN: Oh, great! Who else?

TATE: Fred Robbins and one other guy who flunked out of law school. So I never really followed him.

DONIN: Oh, too bad.

TATE: Robbins became a partner in a Boston law firm. He wanted to practice in Massachusetts and I didn't.

[End of Interview]