

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with John K. Jouett '43
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: Okay, Jack, let's first establish how you ended up coming to Dartmouth originally. Did you have relatives there that went ahead of you? Or what was the story?

JOUETT: Well, I was going to a military prep school in northern New York State, the Manlius School. And there was a family problem. My father insisted that I went to Harvard. My mother said that Yale was the only college in the country and that all my grandfathers and great-uncles and everybody else had gone there, and I was to go to Yale. I was on the Manlius ski team. So I went to Dartmouth.

DONIN: Perfect fit. Did you visit before you went? Or had you seen Dartmouth before you went?

JOUETT: No. I went there cold turkey.

DONIN: Did you have any friends that were also going there?

JOUETT: Two or three from my school went.

DONIN: Oh, so Manlius sends students to Dartmouth routinely.

JOUETT: Right.

DONIN: And you arrived by train or by car?

JOUETT: No. My father drove me up from Washington, DC, where we were living.

DONIN: Do you remember your first impression when you arrived on campus?

JOUETT: Well, I think as any new kid coming up to a completely new thing like that, we're rather overawed. I remember that my room was in North Mass, I think. And I moved in there with a fellow I'd never met before. Peter, I forget his last name right now. He was my roommate. His mother had come up with him, and my dad had come up with me and sort of dumped me in the room and got me

more or less.... And we ran around town getting the necessary things that we had to have. And that was my entry into Dartmouth.

DONIN: And this, of course, was the fall of '39.

JOUETT: That is correct.

DONIN: And so you had a pretty traditional few years there before....

JOUETT: Yes, we did. My freshman year I don't remember I mean all the details. I tried out, of course, for the Dartmouth Ski Team, and I made the squad. And then unfortunately I was skiing behind one of your top skiers, Dick Meservey.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

JOUETT: And Dick zigged, and I zagged. And I did a number on my ankle so that I never was able to do any more competitive skiing.

DONIN: That was it.

JOUETT: I spent a few days in the Mary Hitchcock, and the next year I was able to fun ski, but that was it. But I did not participate in any other heavy sports. I am an individual lover of sports, not a group lover of sports. Just me.

DONIN: Do you have memories of doing all the sort of freshman things, having to wear a beanie?

JOUETT: Yes. You know it's really quite hazy the freshman year there. I remember it was all very strange. One thing I've never forgotten is I think a requirement of the freshmen is geology.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

JOUETT: And it's probably the greatest course I've ever had, because no matter where I am in the world, I can look at rocks and know what they tell me.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

JOUETT: And to me it's one of that, that one of the courses I took in psychology are the two that remain with me.

- DONIN: Stayed with you, yes. Did you already have thoughts of what you wanted to major in?
- JOUETT: I flipped around, and I wanted to major in international relations, possibly go to State Department. But having graduated from an honor military school, I had what they call a certificate of eligibility which meant at the time I was 21, I would become a second lieutenant in the Army Reserves.
- DONIN: Oh. You'd already done all your sort of military training.
- JOUETT: Yes, I'd been through four years at Manlius School, which was an honor military school. I'd been to their summer camp at Camp Plattsburgh where all the ROTC, both college and military prep schools, go for their training. I had that all under my belt. And so when I was 21....
- DONIN: As a student at Dartmouth during those years, '39 and '40, and you were interested in international relations, you must have been keeping a pretty close eye on what was going on, you know, in Europe.
- JOUETT: Well, I've always been...I've always kept current with affairs. And I know at Manlius for several years running I won the *Time Magazine* annual contest for prep schools and got a book from them every year. But I sort of kept up. Dartmouth, I think I was really too busy. I'm not the top student in the world, so I had to work a little bit hard. But I had a fun roommate. That's my next year I moved into Middle Mass. And my roommate, who is still alive, was Roberto Herrera, he's class of '43. I don't think he's going to make the... He's Guatemalan and lives in Guatemala. And interesting, next to me in the Mass were two Japanese students.
- DONIN: Oh, yes.
- JOUETT: Nobu Mitsui and another fellow whom I'm in correspondence with now. He can't make the thing. And it was very interesting. One of them went back and went into the service. And Nobu was a prisoner-of-war in the custody of the prexy of Dartmouth College.
- DONIN: Exactly.
- JOUETT: He stayed in Dartmouth College, which I think was wonderful.

DONIN: It's a better place to be than anywhere else. Fascinating story though.

JOUETT: Oh, it is. You know that story then.

DONIN: I've only heard bits and pieces from people in your class and other classes who remember him being there.

JOUETT: I remember the date of Pearl Harbor I think we went and beat him up. But I mean, you know, in the snow. I think I was down at Colby....

DONIN: Oh, Colby Junior.

JOUETT: Colby Junior dating when that news came, and we all came back.

DONIN: Oh, Pearl Harbor, yes. December 7th. Yes. And Nobu actually had a letter to the editor, I think, following that. Saying that he wasn't very pleased with the reaction of his Dartmouth classmates to him.

JOUETT: I was one of them probably. [Laughter]

DONIN: And his brother went there as well, I think. Quite a bit younger.

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: So, were you planning on pledging a fraternity? What was your whole take on fraternities?

JOUETT: Well, I was all set to go to pledge and all of that, and my father had a heart attack. So I had to fly back—go by train—back to Washington and see my dad just the first week of pledge week. And when I got back, my roommate and others had all joined different fraternities. I looked around, I was asked for a couple and to come visit them.

DONIN: Yes.

JOUETT: And I decided what the heck? My friends are scattered, so I just never joined a fraternity.

DONIN: So you were going to be able to take advantage...

JOUETT: So I was a GDI.

DONIN: What does GDI mean?

JOUETT: God Damn Independent.

DONIN: [Laughs] That's perfect. So did you have any particular professors who really made an impression on you?

JOUETT: Of course having lived in China before as a kid, I got dispensation on my freshman year and took Chinese from Professor Whittemore. So I remember him because I could never please him. He was a taskmaster of the first water. I don't remember the names of any of the professors as such. As I told you, geology has stuck with me. And I remember some courses in English and psychology that at Dartmouth were refreshing because your classes were 14, 20 and only from your freshman universal course that everyone has to take. Every college has it.

DONIN: Sure. Yes.

JOUETT: And introduction to life in the real world. It certainly was a breath of fresh air because Stanford you'd have named professors and their student teachers. In fact, one course at Stanford, I helped my professor write a book and I got my credit for writing a chapter in his book.

DONIN: Yes. So do you have any memories of President Hopkins?

JOUETT: Other than the fact he was God.

DONIN: Wow.

JOUETT: I mean a lowly freshman I think at a reception or something where you meet the president very briefly. But he didn't interfere in our lives. And I certainly didn't seem to get any trouble where I had to come near him.

DONIN: Near him or near Dean Neidlinger, I guess.

JOUETT: I remember the name Dean Neidlinger, yes.

DONIN: Right. You didn't ever—

JOUETT: I think I got nicked by him for low grades or something. But other than that...

DONIN: Uh-huh. So what was your social group? Who was it made up of?

JOUETT: Fellows who went to military school. We sort of had a little bit of a thing. I know when the peace... Where they were working up towards World War II, there were several peace-at-any-price groups that would set up corner kiosks and things. And I think we dumped over a couple of them and got in a little trouble that way. [Laughter] We were sort of fiercely patriotic, I guess you'd put it that way.

DONIN: Sure.

JOUETT: And I do remember Dartmouth was a very pacifist college. And then, boy, they did a double switch. Took in the Navy V-12 courses. And I know I took their math courses. And it was certainly a great switch.

DONIN: Yes. Well, I think it was a switch to keep the school running basically.

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: And they needed to fill those beds in those dormitories. I think Dartmouth had the largest Naval V-12 unit in the country.

JOUETT: When the war broke out, I finished my first semester of my junior year. And since I was going to be commissioned in March, I didn't go back. And then they passed a law which allowed a commissioning under 21. So I was commissioned when I was 20.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

JOUETT: In January or February of '42.

DONIN: Of '42. So you were, oh, okay, so you were halfway through your junior year.

JOUETT: That's right.

DONIN: And that was the point at which they started running classes all year round.

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: They accelerated the classes. And also kept going—

JOUETT: Yes, I've often wondered what would have happened if I'd stayed. But my philosophy in life was always never look back and think about taking another road because the road that I have traveled has been successful, and I've had a helluva good life.

DONIN: Now when you left the college, was your plan to come back there?

JOUETT: Yes. I was stationed at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, Army Intelligence School. And when the great mustering out came, we all were released from the service, and I had practically my car packed, and I was going to turn right and head back to Dartmouth. But my father had gotten to me and said, "Well, I have a 40-foot boat that I've kept in New Orleans." And he said—I knew my dad was moving to the Virgin Islands. He said, "I need to get it sailed down. So if you go to school at Tulane..." I said, "What's Tulane?" He said, "It's a damned good school." So instead of going back to Dartmouth as I'd planned and everything else, I went down to Tulane and did a year there and sailed the boat down to the Virgin Islands the next summer. And then I ended up down there. And my father said, "Well, we don't have any boatyards down here, and we need one badly." So I stayed in and stayed down there and established a small boatyard. And life went on from there.

DONIN: What kept you feeling connected to Dartmouth through all these years? I mean you didn't get a degree from them.

JOUETT: No. But, I don't know. I've always considered myself from Dartmouth. I mean the war interrupted. I mean that was the thing. And the fact that I didn't go back. I went to Tulane. But right after the war, you were young, going ahead, learning... It isn't like when you get old and you start to think about what was the best influence you've ever had. And just as time went on, I always made a contribution to Dartmouth, and I visited the campus one time and showed my wife. I've taken my son to Dartmouth to see it. He was interested there, and they weren't particularly interested in him. His grades weren't the best. I just have always thought of Dartmouth as my college. I went to Stanford... Well, I was at Tulane for a year, and if I'd gone back I'd have gotten a degree in accounting and headed to law. But I didn't. And so when the government sent me to

Stanford on a master's program in Far East Studies and not having my baccalaureate, so I just got a baccalaureate from Stanford, but I was on a master's program.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

JOUETT: So I never was part of Stanford because here I was an army major at full pay and allowances and two kids and all. And I had promoted an office in the stacks. And so I got on my bicycle. Rode down there in the morning, did my work, went up to the stacks, did my homework, came home and lived a normal eight to four job.

DONIN: The balance of your undergraduate experience did take place at Dartmouth.

JOUETT: Yes. I really in many ways wish I'd... Well, I've never really thought of it because things turned out so remarkably for me.

DONIN: Right.

JOUETT: And I met my Marjorie in St. Thomas. And God knows what would have happened if I'd gone back up there.

DONIN: Exactly.

JOUETT: It would have been an entirely different life. I would have probably ended up in New England because my mother's family is all from Waterbury-Hartford. And they're very, very tightknit New England people.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So your roots are New England.

JOUETT: Yes. My father's roots are San Francisco, and I never knew his family.

DONIN: So how is it that the class was able to stay connected to one another? And how do you maintain your class identity with so much disruption and people going in a hundred different directions?

JOUETT: I have no clue. Other members of the class—I have not participated—who have written me a greeting once a month or once a quarter and kept in touch since I got back. Many years later when I was financially able, I have always given some to

Dartmouth. I've just established in my mind that it's the college that I belong to.

DONIN: Right.

JOUETT: And somebody told me one time, they said, "You know there's something about you Dartmouth people. I've never known a group of people that loved their college more than the people who went to Dartmouth love it."

DONIN: It's true, isn't it?

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: And people have tried to figure that out for decades, I think. You know what is it that that experience up there in the woods does to these men?

JOUETT: I know it certainly shocked me when I went back for my 40th to find things like the murals down in Thayer, covered because they were politically incorrect.

DONIN: I know.

JOUETT: Heavy political correctness, it was sweeping the area. I don't know if it's still a part of society or not. It's one of those things that's happened that wasn't good for our country, but whatever.

DONIN: And of course there were women there at your reunion, weren't there?

JOUETT: Yes, and that was a little shocking.

DONIN: [Laughs] Right.

JOUETT: To see them in cap and gown and bare feet and cursing like sailors. Words sailors didn't even know.

DONIN: Well, I think those early women who went there had to be pretty tough.

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: They weren't entirely welcome, so they had to be a little bit tough-skinned, I think.

JOUETT: Right. I'll probably see it entirely different when I go up. I'm certainly looking forward to it.

DONIN: Now when you went back.... Oh, so when you went back in '83, the Hopkins Center was built, the performing arts center.

JOUETT: Oh, yes. Well, I had been there with my son and gone in and seen some Shakespeare there.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Great.

JOUETT: And I was highly impressed with that.

DONIN: Yes.

JOUETT: And I think in the last reunion we had... In the classes of '42 and '43 have become one class because of the war. They had a jazz band, I think, that that class had and did recordings and everything else.

DONIN: Oh, great!

JOUETT: And I remember that. Very good actually.

DONIN: That's the Barbary Coast Jazz Band.

JOUETT: Yes.

DONIN: Right. They're still going strong. Back in those days people went to all the football games and watched all the sporting events.

JOUETT: Oh, absolutely. And I was there on the fifth down game because as freshmen we had to go.

DONIN: Oh, that's right. Didn't you sit in a separate area?

JOUETT: Absolutely.

DONIN: Right. So you were supposed to get to know all your classmates.

JOUETT: That's right.

DONIN: Did you do a lot of road trips down to the various colleges? I know you mentioned that on Pearl Harbor Day you were....

JOUETT: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Bennington, I think, was my favorite.
[Laughs]

DONIN: Oh, was it? How did you get there? Because of the gas rationing and everything. It must have been tough.

JOUETT: No, this was before gas.... Gas rationing wasn't....

DONIN: Oh, that didn't happen until later.

JOUETT: No, no. I don't know. OPC. Other students' cars. And I think one or two semesters I had a family car myself. So there were wheels.

DONIN: You must have been a popular guy.

JOUETT: There were wheels.

DONIN: Now did you have to get a part-time job like so many students did?

JOUETT: No, I didn't. My tuition, I had an allowance. I'll admit life was pretty different there. The Hanover bank that we had used to know that we'd kite checks on Sunday and we wouldn't get the funds in 'til Tuesday.

DONIN: And they had no problem with that. [Laughter]

JOUETT: No. No.

DONIN: Boy, times have changed.

JOUETT: [...] I had a disappointment at Dartmouth. In my sophomore year my roommate, being Guatemalan, and Spanish being my minor, I cooked up the idea of a year of study in South America. And through my father's contact, I was able to get stamp of approval from the Grace Corporation for the scheme which was essentially go to school at the University of Peru for a semester. Then work for about a semester for Grace and go to the University of Chile. And I have letters and files, the prexies all had been arranged. And the powers that be in Dartmouth refused to endorse it. And now they do foreign studies as a part of everybody's curriculum.

DONIN: It's built into the curriculum.

JOUETT: I know. It was just one year too soon. The war would have stopped it anyway.

DONIN: Yes.

JOUETT: But I had that whole thing. And it was even... One of the Rockefellers who was head of Grace knew about it and said he'd cooperate. And that was back, you see, in '42. But that took a bit of my time. And as I say, I wasn't in any specific intramural sport. I played golf there. And I skied in the wintertime the best I could. I think I did some tennis.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. You kept busy.

JOUETT: I don't remember being un-busy at Dartmouth.

DONIN: No.

JOUETT: I do remember that we used to have to double team the football players before exams. [Laughter] Tutoring them. I remember because I was in the group that would work with some of them before their exams.

DONIN: Well now I think they actually have an academic office that helps them with their studies.

JOUETT: Well, Dartmouth has never gone into picking up people on football scholarships. I don't think that's part of the agenda there.

DONIN: No. Some of them are real scholar-athletes. Bright kids.

[End of Interview]