

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Malcolm McLane '46
By Mary Donin
February 1, 2008

DONIN: How was it that you chose to come to Dartmouth as an undergrad?

McLANE: Well, we were all Dartmouth. [Laughs]

DONIN: Yes, the McLane family has a long history.

McLANE: My father and two brothers, and we were all skiers, New Hampshire people. I think it was inevitable that I would come to Dartmouth.

DONIN: Yes. It was part of your life from the first day probably that you were going to come to Dartmouth. So you matriculated in, let's see 1942.

McLANE: That's right.

DONIN: In the fall?

McLANE: I came that summer.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: Having graduated from prep school in June, I came right up here.

DONIN: Well, at that point they were—

McLANE: The war was on; we were in the war. And we all knew we'd be in the service in six months. So it was just a matter of getting started.

DONIN: So what was the thinking? They wanted you— Rather than enlisting right away, right out of high school, you wanted to get a semester of education under your belt before going into the war?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: I mean, I wasn't sure when I'd be called that way.

DONIN: Did you enlist, or were you drafted?

McLANE: I enlisted. There was a Dartmouth group—there had been a Dartmouth group going in the service six months or a year before. And that was talked about quite a bit.

DONIN: That was the Dartmouth Squadron, right?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And that was the group you were with.

McLANE: Yes, but there'd been one before.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

McLANE: I think a Navy group.

DONIN: Uh-huh. But the group you were with was the Army Air Corps, is that right?

McLANE: That's right.

DONIN: Yes. And did you go with other classmates?

McLANE: I came to Dartmouth for the summer. Well, then when I got here, I got involved with this outfit and signed up.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: And we were told to finish out the—to stay in college until they let us know.

DONIN: I see.

McLANE: Because I spent the fall term waiting. And then I got called up to report in January '43. We all reported together.

DONIN: You all went together, the squadron, the Dartmouth Squadron, right? There was a group of you.

McLANE: Yes, we were just a bunch of individuals until we got to the service and we were sworn in that fall and told to report in early January. And everybody reported at that time. There's a picture of us all lined up.

DONIN: I've seen that picture in the book one of your roommates wrote. Robert Heussler? He was one of your roommates?

McLANE: Bob Heussler.

DONIN: He wrote a book called "Interlude in the Forties" and there's a chapter about you. And that photograph of all of you lined up is in that book. It's a wonderful picture. So tell us a little bit about that first term at Dartmouth. Were you able to enjoy just being a regular college freshman that first term?

McLANE: Oh sure, we were not in the service yet. So we were just freshmen.

DONIN: Did you have to wear one of those freshmen beanies?

McLANE: I don't remember. [Laughter] There weren't many freshmen around.

DONIN: That's right. There weren't many.

McLANE: So there wasn't the usual hazing of college freshmen.

DONIN: Do you remember what dorm you were in when you were a freshman?

McLANE: Richardson. I finally picked up a couple of roommates that I met that summer. Bob Heussler and Lowell Thomas. They'd both been at Taft together.

DONIN: You were quite an athlete I gather. Ski team?

McLANE: No. I was rather small.

DONIN: But you were on the ski team, I know, right?

McLANE: Skiing was my favorite sport.

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: Growing up.

DONIN: But you probably did that growing up, didn't you?

McLANE: Yes. I was here at Dartmouth essentially from July to December.

DONIN: Of '42.

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Right. And then you left.

McLANE: So I really didn't ski at that time.

DONIN: Right. Coming back though probably you skied.

McLANE: We did some running together in the hills and woods.

DONIN: Ah. Cross-country.

McLANE: No competition.

DONIN: This was just for fun. Right. So you got to matriculate when Ernest Martin Hopkins was the president. Do you remember that, sitting down and meeting him for the first time?

McLANE: Yes, I have an impression of that. I knew him. My father was on the board of trustees.

DONIN: Right. So you'd met him previously.

McLANE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Your romance with the dean's daughter, did that start before you went in the war or after?

McLANE: We were pretty young. [Laughter]

DONIN: You were pretty young.

McLANE: She was 12, and I was 17.

DONIN: Did you know her when you started as a freshman? Had you already met?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: So let's jump to your extraordinary war experience for a minute because it is quite a story. Heussler described some of it in his book.

McLANE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: That you were captured. You were shot down and captured. You were a prisoner-of-war for six months or so?

McLANE: That's right.

DONIN: Is that right? Yes. And when you returned from the war, you came right back to Dartmouth?

McLANE: I came up that summer of '45.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: To get the lay of the land and find out about coming back. I was told that if I wanted to come back, they'd be glad to have me. See I'm leaping ahead about three years now.

DONIN: That's ok.

McLANE: So I reported back as a deferred one-term freshman. And they gave me credit for time spent.

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: And that gave me my whole freshman year.

DONIN: And the classes were still being accelerated at that point, I think, too. They were compressing the classes quite a bit and still running year-round.

McLANE: They just hadn't gotten around to stopping doing that.

DONIN: Right. Exactly. So you finally graduated in '48?

McLANE: I graduated in '48.

DONIN: Uh-huh. But you still identified with the class of '46, right?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Yes. So when you returned in '45, there was a new president of the college.

McLANE: That's right.

DONIN: In the fall of '45 John Dickey came to be president.

McLANE: Yes. My father kept me up to date on a lot.

DONIN: So you knew what was going on at the college because of your father's connections here, right.

McLANE: I did. They came up for football games.

DONIN: Sure.

McLANE: And I was living at home.

DONIN: So the college must have been a very different place when you came back because it was a mixture of returning veterans and civilian students.

McLANE: Yes, very young.

DONIN: Very what?

McLANE: Young.

DONIN: Very young, right. But the civilians must have felt somewhat intimidated by all of you sort of mature veterans who'd been through the war.

McLANE: That's for them to say. [Laughs] I don't know.

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: I mean, they were older than I was. A lot of them.

DONIN: The civilians were?

McLANE: It's quite possible.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. How do you think the college managed to sort of mainstream these two very different groups of undergraduates that they had to deal with? Do you think they did a good job of—

McLANE: Because of my familiarity with the college, I had two brothers here before me and my father's connection, I sort of knew the college. I mean, you mentioned my future wife. The dean and his wife and his teenage daughters all lived behind Baker Library. Marion [Neidlinger] had perpetual coffee served in the morning for friends. I was a friend quite quickly. [Laughs]

DONIN: Right. [Laughs] That's nice.

McLANE: Friends would drop in. As I say, Susan was young. By then she was all of 15, I think.

DONIN: Right. So was she going to Hanover High School at the time?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

McLANE: And obviously the Dartmouth boys—age didn't make much difference. [Laughter]

DONIN: So you weren't considered off limits?

McLANE: People hung around.

DONIN: Because of her age, you weren't considered off limits, because you were too old?

McLANE: No, no.

DONIN: No?

McLANE: No, the girls were beginning to take an interest in the boys.

DONIN: Sure.

McLANE: There was no question that the boys were interested in the girls.

DONIN: Right, right. [Laughs]

McLANE: What month was that? I remember going over to ski maybe in early December at Pico Peak, Pico Peak. There's a major ski area there now. It's all part of Killington, I guess. So, anyway, we all went over there and skied. And I was already trying out for the ski team. And I picked up a Ford convertible, '38 or '39. They weren't making cars after that. So Susan and her twin sister Sally, who was then [inaudible], and some other friends of theirs, they would all pile into my car, skis in the rumble seat.

DONIN: Now was there gas rationing still going on at this point?

McLANE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Oh.

McLANE: I don't know when that stopped. I know I didn't use the car very much. It was handy to have a car.

DONIN: You must have been a popular guy because of your car.

McLANE: [Laughs]

DONIN: [Laughs] People are constantly talking about the road trips they'd take with their buddies that had the car. They were the most popular guys on campus.

McLANE: Just being a guy was pretty good. [Laughter]

DONIN: Yes. Especially a guy with a car. [Laughter]

McLANE: A war hero. [Laughter]

DONIN: Not to mention a war hero, a former POW.

McLANE: And a friend of family's. That got me access.

DONIN: So did you feel like you were treated as a war hero when you got back here by your classmates?

McLANE: Oh, I never thought of it in relation to my classmates. A lot of people coming and going, in different status. Some of them military still, some just out of the military. Clearly they were guys who were coming back to school.

DONIN: Yes.

McLANE: And you didn't necessarily know except for rank and service and where; that's about all you knew. You didn't talk about it, talk about your own career. Everybody else had a career too.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

McLANE: Just glad to be back.

DONIN: Glad to be back.

McLANE: I think I got involved quite quickly with the glee club; Don Cobleigh was the director of the glee club. I know that both of my roommates were in the glee club. And we were tuning up for fall football weekends where we were going to sing. It was a chance to travel away from Hanover.

DONIN: Oh, yes, as part of the glee club. Now at this point I guess they were opening up the fraternities again, too, after '45. Did you join a fraternity?

McLANE: Yes. Deke. DKE.

DONIN: Deke. Mm-hmm.

McLANE: But I was not much of a fraternity person. I pledged I guess. Everybody assumed that I'd be on the ski team.

DONIN: Right. You had a reputation.

McLANE: My brother Charles who is back here now living at Kendal, he graduated in '41. He'd gone into the service; but he'd been on the ski team and in the mountains with the ski troops.

DONIN: The Tenth Mountain Division, right.

McLANE: I mean he was my older brother by far. He'd been in the service and out of it, and I hadn't even gotten there yet.

DONIN: Right. So how was it going back to being a student after your war experiences? Was it hard to settle back into the academic life?

McLANE: Not really. I'd been a good student at prep school. I sort of knew what I was going to do. And I was able to handle the studies and sing the music and the ski team training. [inaudible] I love the outdoors. Spent a lot of time just running and getting in shape.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: I knew Walter Prager the coach. I don't know when he got back because he'd been in the ski troops, too.

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: I came back very promptly because I'd been a prisoner-of-war, and you didn't have to have points to get discharged. Everybody else accumulated points, how long you were in the service, what you'd done.

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: If you were an ex-POW, you automatically were put on the list for discharge.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: Because they'd long since lost track of all the Dartmouth Squadron.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: So after being called up and we were in the service. Soon after I was back, I'm now talking about '43 I suppose. Soon after I was in uniform, I was out at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama. They had 5,000 guys out there on exercises. And during the break they read off some names from the platform. One of them was mine, to report to so-and-so. And I did. And they told me that there were a few vacancies. The classes went through the training process on a monthly basis, two months for the program, first pre-flight was called. And I got called a double promotion and after one month I would move up a class.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: The classes had letters. I was 43H, which meant I was A, B, C, D...H corresponded with the end of August I would finish that phase of the program as a cadet. They gave me a double promotion; they

called it first grade, like grade school. You're going to get a double promotion. You're going to jump over a month.

DONIN: Yes.

McLANE: So goodbye Dartmouth. I never saw them again.

DONIN: You left that group, yes.

McLANE: I left that group. So I didn't...I hadn't had very long to get to know them anyway. A month after I was sworn in, I was on my way out.

DONIN: Most of them came back when you came back, when they returned to Dartmouth?

McLANE: Did they?

DONIN: Did they return to Dartmouth?

McLANE: Oh, yes, but all different classes.

DONIN: Yes.

McLANE: Because I'd never had any but six months of regular classes. I wasn't even a sophomore yet. Whereas they had had all sorts of....

DONIN: Different years.

McLANE: Different years.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: A lot of them came back quite a bit later than I did, I suppose.

DONIN: Yes, well, they had to earn their points; whereas you didn't because of your POW status.

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. I see. So what did all this sort of coming and going and being separated from your classmates and seeing some of them at different times when you returned—what did that do to your feeling of sort of class unity and togetherness? Was it difficult to feel like you were a united class of 1946?

- McLANE: From my point of view, which was so different from somebody from the Midwest who had never been in Hanover. [Laughs] I graduated from prep school. Came to Dartmouth. Sort of expected to spend four years before going off to have my career. Everything changed when I knew I had to be in the service but I didn't really know what that would be like in terms of activity. Now at this point, I sort of jumped ahead three years. I had no more service and I was back and I was looking forward to skiing and studying my college studies. How I would handle it. It wasn't all that new. I had a few friends from the service connection. But only the two roommates. I didn't pick up a lot of new friends from the Dartmouth Squadron.
- DONIN: Well, you got separated from them. So you didn't actually spend that much time with them.
- McLANE: But somehow or other I kept in touch with them.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- McLANE: Bob Heussler of course came down with polio.
- DONIN: Yes.
- McLANE: I kind of kept in touch with him. And Lowell Thomas. And it turned out they both came back to college at the same time and roomed together.
- DONIN: Right. But when you returned, you then watched your class of '46 actually have a graduation ceremony but you weren't part of it because you hadn't finished yet.
- McLANE: That's right.
- DONIN: So I'm wondering how you kept your identity with the class of '46. Not just you but the rest of your classmates. Because not very many of you actually graduated in 1946. And so you were all sort of spread out and doing graduation at different times. I'm wondering how that....
- McLANE: By the time I graduated, most of the class probably had already graduated.
- DONIN: Right. But you kept your identity with the class of '46 nonetheless.

McLANE: Absolutely.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

McLANE: Well, the bulk of the class of '46, the majority of them, probably the tag end of enrollments. The war ended, and we'd grown up. A few years older.

DONIN: Yes.

McLANE: I don't know. When did those who graduated in '48, when did they matriculate?

DONIN: You know it could have been any time in the forties.

McLANE: In the normal course.

DONIN: Oh, in the normal course, if they were regular civilian students, they would have matriculated in '44. But, you know, during those years, it was all mixed up and jumbled and people were coming and going. And there weren't that many civilian students here who did a traditional four-year education. Most of them were like you in the sense that they....

McLANE: Even if you were healthy and went right through, you probably spent three years here.

DONIN: Right. Well, the college, you know, accelerated all their classes to get people as educated as they could as quickly as they could. So you started here in the summer of '42, right? Yes. At that point, they started running classes year-round.

McLANE: We had just gotten into the war in December of '41.

DONIN: The war had just begun and I think that summer of '42 when you came was when they first started the accelerated classes.

McLANE: And your question was how did they adjust?

DONIN: Uh-huh.

McLANE: The football team played football.

DONIN: What's that?

McLANE: I said the football team played football. [Laughter]

DONIN: Right.

McLANE: They probably weren't considered very good. But a lot of the kids got the chance to make the team that wouldn't have otherwise.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. But you probably missed out on some of the traditions that were dropped during that period. You know Homecoming and Winter Carnival. Well, you were here for Winter Carnival. But Homecoming and some of the—as you said, a lot of the....

McLANE: With gas rationing, you couldn't travel much.

DONIN: Right. And there weren't enough upperclassmen to do the hazing that was usually going on with the freshmen. So some of the traditions I think were put on hold for a while and then they picked them up again after the war was over.

McLANE: For the girls.

DONIN: [Laughter] Right. Now, did you have any friends who came back married, with wives?

McLANE: There wasn't time. Once you were called up and put on active duty, just... You know getting married when you haven't finished freshman year of college, it doesn't make sense. Although my brother had done that back in the thirties.

DONIN: Right. Well, people probably did things faster than they normally would have because of the war.

McLANE: We didn't plan on it.

McLANE: We identified more with activities like glee club, ski team, outing club.

DONIN: Now, when you came back, were you able to take President Dickey's Great Issues course?

McLANE: Yes.

DONIN: I think it was a requirement for seniors, wasn't it?

McLANE: Yes. I very much wanted to. I was looking forward to it. We were all a lot more serious about politics and we were over 20 years old.

DONIN: Right, you were older. So your social life really focused around... It wasn't as much your fraternity as it was your friends in the other activities that you participated in.

McLANE: Yes, that was always true. I was never a really active fraternity member.

DONIN: Well, it sounds like you had so many other activities to participate in, that you didn't really need the fraternity life.

McLANE: No, coming from New Hampshire I went over to the lake, Newfound Lake, where my family had a place.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

McLANE: With a bunch of guys and girls together. It was almost like a coeducational institution.

DONIN: [Laughs]

McLANE: Yes, that was lucky. When the girls were young enough... The oldest Neidlinger went off to college. The youngest two and their friends, 15 and 16, they didn't go for two or three years.

DONIN: Right. Well, being friends with the Neidlingers, I think, gave you a different... access to a different sort of social life than the traditional Dartmouth undergrad.

McLANE: Yes, it did. You're right about that.

DONIN: Most people were scared to death of Dean Neidlinger. [Laughter]

McLANE: Pretty awesome.

DONIN: Nobody wanted to be called into the dean's office in those days.

McLANE: I was a pretty good boy. I didn't get called in.

- DONIN: That's a good thing. Especially if you wanted to marry his daughter, that's probably a good thing.
- McLANE: I called on him; he didn't call on me. [Laughter]
- DONIN: Well that's good. Is there anything else you want to share with us Mr. McLane? About your Dartmouth experience?
- McLANE: When I came back—I wasn't here very long before active service. When I came back from active service, I really wanted to have the Dartmouth experience because I knew what that meant. Boys who hadn't lived in Hanover, they didn't get enough of it before going off. Because everybody got called up I think or they volunteered.
- DONIN: Sure. Well, you got to live the Dartmouth experience when you came back then, is that right?
- McLANE: That's right, yes.
- DONIN: Good.
- McLANE: The war ended the end of August and it took me a while to get back from where we were. But I think it all went pretty smoothly for me. I had roommates who were good friends. And I was working out with the ski team getting into shape. Looking up young girls you'd known when you left, to see whether they had grown up somewhat. Walter Prager was the coach. He'd gotten married at the end of the service. Ellen Prager. She was here in town and she used to welcome us to their apartment. She was sort of a substitute. We still favored mothers and sisters
- DONIN: So you got married after you graduated?
- McLANE: April 30. Susan was a freshman at Mount Holyoke. And I had gotten a Rhodes Scholarship and I was off to England for two years. I guess we weren't confident about our love enough to say we'd wait. [Laughter] Somebody else would have picked her up if I'd gone off to England for two years.
- DONIN: That was also the trend also. I think there was the sense that some of your classmates have talked about of wanting to get on with their lives. They wanted to finish college as quickly as they could and they did do things quickly and with much less thinking because the

War was over and you were ready to move on with things so you got married as quickly as you could.

McLANE: I think we were pretty serious about our studies. You know, we worked hard and we studied hard.

DONIN: Sounds like you exercised hard as well.

McLANE: Yes. I don't think we were heavy drinkers. I think a party was beer and hanging out. I'd sort of missed that.

DONIN: You had missed that. That's right.

McLANE: We enjoyed that. Dartmouth is a beautiful place to be. You don't have to travel so far. You are already here.

DONIN: Exactly. And it sounds like you got to enjoy a slice of traditional college life after your war experience.

McLANE: Oh yes.

DONIN: Well, if you don't have anything further, I am going to turn off the tape. Is that all right?

McLANE: Sure.

[End of Interview]