

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Joan Rowan (spouse of Charles Rowan '45)
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: The first thing we always like to find out is, do you know why Charles chose to go to Dartmouth? Was there a family connection that brought him here or how he found out about it?

ROWAN: Not that I know of. No. I really don't know why he chose it.

DONIN: Where was he in high school before he came to Dartmouth?

ROWAN: Phillips.

DONIN: Oh, okay. So he was at Phillips Exeter Academy.

ROWAN: Oh, that's right. Yes.

DONIN: A popular feeder school, so to speak.

ROWAN: Yes, yes. That must have been the reason.

DONIN: Right.

ROWAN: From Exeter to Dartmouth.

DONIN: And he probably had friends that were talking about going to Dartmouth there perhaps.

ROWAN: Probably. Yes, yes. Because of course I didn't know him.

DONIN: In those days.

ROWAN: At all until much later.

DONIN: Do you know what the chronology of... I know in one of his reunion books he described his Dartmouth experience as Phase 1 and Phase 2. And I assume that means that he came here originally in 1941, before the war started. Do you know if he spent his whole first—so-called freshman—year here, before enlisting?

ROWAN: Yes, he did. Yes.

DONIN: And then what was the chronology of him coming to London to meet you?

ROWAN: He volunteered along with, I think it was two or three other Dartmouth men to join OSS.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

ROWAN: And was stationed in London.

DONIN: I see.

ROWAN: A while before I was— Well, I think I was.... I was stationed there in the Women's Royal Naval Service. They called us WRENS.

DONIN: WRENS, yes.

ROWAN: So we were both in London, but we didn't meet for quite a while. And we met because I had a friend who was with me in London in the WRENS, and she had met these boys, all from Dartmouth College. And she said, "Oh, they're such fun. You must come and meet them." So I finally said, "Okay. I will." So I met six-foot four, and that was it. [Laughs]

DONIN: Amazing. Six-foot four.

ROWAN: Six-foot four. Five-foot two met six-foot four. [Laughter]

DONIN: You must have made quite a couple.

ROWAN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Was it set up as sort of a blind date or did you go with your girlfriend?

ROWAN: Yes, yes, yes. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: So how many Dartmouth men were there in this group?

ROWAN: There were four altogether. Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Do you remember the names of any of the rest of them?

ROWAN: Oh, yes. Dick Wood, yes. He was from Dartmouth. Yes. He's the only one I remember.

DONIN: Now did he find himself a British spouse the way your husband did? Did he marry—

ROWAN: Yes, he did.

DONIN: Did he?

ROWAN: Jean.

DONIN: Oh, one of your friends.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: So how long did you date?

NANCY ROWAN: You must have met Dad in 1942 maybe, because you were married in 1944.

ROWAN: So, no, it was no rushed affair. At least a year, I think. Yes.

NANCY ROWAN: It was wartime so you didn't wait too long.

DONIN: Right. So did you live in barracks the way he did? Where were you living?

ROWAN: No. We were living in—They called it of course the quarters because it was the Navy.

DONIN: So you were right in London and you were as well.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: And did you see him on a regular basis? Or was he traveling?

ROWAN: No, I saw him fairly regularly. Well, I have to tell you one thing. I, at that time, I was rather interested in a naval officer. And we were having lunch together. And someone in the WREN's quarters had told him—had told Charles when he went to see how I was doing and so forth—and somebody told him, Oh, she's out having lunch with so-and-so. And where? And all of a sudden this six-foot four appeared at the table. [Laughs] And that was the end of my lunch with the naval officer.

DONIN: I see. He came to stake his claim on you, it sounds like.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: So you were torn between this naval officer and Charles at that point?

ROWAN: Oh, no, I wasn't torn between either, no. No. I was just feeling my way.

DONIN: Yes. Right. That's a good story. So you were married in London.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: Before the war was over.

ROWAN: Actually it was just south of London in Wimbledon, where my family were living: my mother and father and my brother. Mm-hmm. And we were married there. And it was such fun because half of the guests were English and half were American.

DONIN: That's great. And was his friend Dick there? Did his friend Dick come to the wedding?

ROWAN: Yes. He was our best man.

DONIN: Oh, wonderful.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: And had he married Jean at that time? Or were they still dating?

ROWAN: No, I think they were dating still. Yes.

DONIN: And then he ended up being Dick's best man.

ROWAN: Yes, yes. That's right.

DONIN: So how long was it until you came to the States? Was it after the war?

ROWAN: Oh, yes. Yes, it was. It was. Yes, I arrived in the States in 1946.

DONIN: And what was that like, coming here to a strange country as a newlywed?

NANCY ROWAN: Tell about the trip.

ROWAN: Do you want to hear the whole story?

DONIN: I want to hear about how you got here.

ROWAN: Oh, okay. I had to take a train from London to Liverpool. And get on a merchant ship with I think there were three more war brides whom I can't remember, you know. They weren't special friends. And there were all kinds of trouble at the ports in those days. So I ended up sailing from Liverpool on this merchant ship, coming through the Panama Canal, and finally arriving in Portland, Oregon.

DONIN: Oh, my goodness!

ROWAN: Yes. We were told that we were going to go to San Francisco. And everyone was so excited because everybody knew about San Francisco. However, at the last minute that was changed because there was some trouble there, too. And we went on to Portland, Oregon. And then I took a train all the way across country to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where my mother-in-law lived.

DONIN: Oh, gracious! How long did this all take?

ROWAN: [Laughs] Weeks and weeks. Yes. Probably about six weeks. Yes, I can laugh now. [Laughter]

DONIN: Where was Charles at this point?

ROWAN: He was already back at Dartmouth and was—because he was class of '45. So he had to finish his education. So I stayed in Pittsburgh; well, it wasn't very long because— Oh, January 1946 I arrived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My mother-in-law was most kind; she was wonderful. But after a while I thought, I just can't wait any longer. So I got on a train and came up to—

DONIN: White River Junction.

ROWAN: White River Junction, yes. That's right, where Charles met me.

DONIN: Happy days for you.

ROWAN: Yes, happy days, finally. We lived in 302 South Fayerweather.

DONIN: Oh, right across the street.

ROWAN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

DONIN: What was that housing like for you?

ROWAN: Well, it was very basic. There was no—For instance, most important, no cooking arrangement. We had a little sort of, a little cooker.

DONIN: Yes.

ROWAN: On the living room floor. Well, there was only a living room actually. And in the kitchen there was nothing modern, of course. Nothing.

DONIN: Did you have a sink and a refrigerator and such? Maybe a small refrigerator?

ROWAN: We must have had one. I don't remember a refrigerator. No.

DONIN: People have told stories about putting their milk out on the window ledge.

ROWAN: Oh, yes, yes. The same way all the washing was hand washing, of course, and then you hung that out the window to dry. But the college was absolutely wonderful to us, absolutely marvelous. I mean, it wasn't too long before they installed—you could cook in the kitchen, and there was a refrigerator and a little washer and dryer.

DONIN: Uh-huh. So they fixed up the rooms to make them a little more habitable.

ROWAN: Oh, absolutely. They were wonderful. And I remember the first night we could cook in the kitchen. Afterwards we all met in the hallway [laughs] to say, "What did you cook? And how did it go?"

DONIN: What a luxury after living without anything.

ROWAN: I know. But really it didn't seem too—I mean they really made a marvelous effort to, you know, accommodate us because of course there were so many young wives who came.

DONIN: There were lots of veterans, yes.

ROWAN: Yes, who came. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: And what other sort of welcoming gestures do you remember that the college made for the wives? Did they offer you opportunities to—

ROWAN: Oh, yes, to work.

DONIN: To work?

ROWAN: Yes. As a matter of fact, I worked in the office of a professor, shorthand and typing.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. And did most of the wives whom you got to know in Fayerweather, were they working?

ROWAN: Yes. They nearly all found jobs, which again I thought was wonderful. It was entirely, if you wanted to, you know. And some of them worked in the sports department.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

ROWAN: And some of them worked, as I say, secretarial, as I did. And quite a variety of jobs.

DONIN: And your husband was busy finishing up his education.

ROWAN: Oh, yes. Yes.

DONIN: Did you have any time for a social life, or was he—

ROWAN: Oh, lots of social life, yes.

DONIN: Oh, really!

ROWAN: [Laughs] Yes. And also our son was born at Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh, at the old Mary Hitchcock Hospital.

ROWAN: Absolutely. Yes.

DONIN: Dr. Boardman?

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: Ah-ha!

ROWAN: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: So a lot of the women were having children when they came back then, of your friends in Fayerweather.

ROWAN: Yes. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Did you feel that you were settling in nicely? I mean, this was your first slice of American life. Did you feel you were settling in nicely while you were here?

ROWAN: Well, yes. Of course because of the fact that there were so many of us, you know, so many young wives and young husbands, of course....

DONIN: Right. Other war brides.

ROWAN: Yes, war brides, that's it. That's it exactly. So it was so friendly.

DONIN: So what were you able to do for a social life here, as couples? What was available in Hanover to do?

ROWAN: Well.... Oh, that's right. The Phi Delta Theta house was Charles'...

DONIN: Oh. So he joined a—

ROWAN: Oh, yes. He'd been before the war. And so we could meet there, you know, and have parties and so forth, and socialize. So that was good. And we picnicked out of doors. [Looking at photographs.] Well, it was good. But the space was minimal.

DONIN: Very basic, it looks like.

ROWAN: Yes.

DONIN: Very basic—

ROWAN: Very basic.

DONIN: —accommodations.

ROWAN: Yes. [Laughs]

DONIN: Well, in fact you were living in what used to be dormitory rooms.

ROWAN: Well, they were.

DONIN: Yes.

ROWAN: They definitely were dormitory rooms.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

ROWAN: I mean they didn't do anything, of course, to change them.

DONIN: No.

ROWAN: I mean there was no need to.

DONIN: Right. Did you have your own bathrooms or did you have to go down the hall to the community bathroom?

ROWAN: No, we did have our own bath. Wait a minute, wait. No, we did have our own bathrooms.

DONIN: So you washed all your own laundry by hand?

ROWAN: Yes, but it didn't... We didn't have to do it for long before they came in, as I say, and modernized for us. It was wonderful.

DONIN: Now did you pass a winter here? Were you here over a winter?

ROWAN: Oh, yes.

DONIN: How did you find that, the winters?

ROWAN: Well, it was rather dreadful, but I got used to it. I got used to the snow and, oh, yes.

DONIN: Did your husband want you to learn to ski and go hiking and all that stuff?

ROWAN: No. No, fortunately. [Laughter] No, we just plodded around and, you know.

DONIN: Right.

ROWAN: As I say. We had plenty of friends, naturally, because it was that time, you know, when the war was over and a lot of them had married and were finishing.

DONIN: Now did you ever encounter any members of the Dartmouth administration or any of his professors? For instance, did you ever meet President Hopkins before he retired or President Dickey when he arrived?

ROWAN: Oh, not personally, no.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

ROWAN: No, no.

DONIN: So there wasn't an opportunity for the married wives to engage with the—

ROWAN: Not that I can recall, no.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

ROWAN: No.

DONIN: And what was available in terms of— Could you go to the movies or listen to concerts or plays? Did you do any of that sort of thing?

ROWAN: Oh, yes. And actually Charles was really an excellent actor. And he was in *The Late George Appley*.

DONIN: Oh! So he was in the Dartmouth Players.

ROWAN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

ROWAN: Yes, and he was wonderful. He really was excellent. It's quite a gift. [...]

DONIN: And what did they do—Were women also included in the plays that they put on here?

ROWAN: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Where did they find women to be the, to play the roles?

ROWAN: I don't know. I didn't know any of the women in *The Late George Appley*. I didn't know the men either except for Charles.

DONIN: Did he ever talk about how Dartmouth was different when he came back from when he was an undergraduate before the war?

ROWAN: No.

- DONIN: Did he feel that it had changed at all? That the college had changed or that he had changed as a student?
- ROWAN: I don't think so. I think he settled into the life that he knew, that he had to follow in order to get his degree. But I don't remember him ever being upset or dissatisfied.
- DONIN: Was it odd for him to be back here without his classmates, his classmates from '44? Or maybe there were enough on campus along with him?
- ROWAN: There were enough. There were enough. Yes. Oh, yes. He was never without friendships. Mm-hmm.
- DONIN: Now what about his friend Dick who was his best man in England? Did he come back on campus at the same time?
- ROWAN: Yes, he did. Except I think Dick was—I think he was '44; I think he was. But he was back with wife Jean.
- DONIN: Now did he get to have an actual graduation ceremony when he finally got his degree? Or did he just finish up and off you went to a job in Chatham?
- ROWAN: I can't remember any celebration.
- DONIN: When did he finish up? So when did you leave here?
- ROWAN: Oh, it was '46. It had to be.
- NANCY ROWAN: No, you were here for about a year. You must have left around January '47.
- DONIN: Ah-ha!
- ROWAN: 'Forty-seven?
- NANCY ROWAN: You were here for a year, I think. Paul was born in September of '46. And then you left in January or February.
- DONIN: So he was a newborn.
- ROWAN: Yes.
- ROWAN: A lot of the students who were here at the time didn't stay around for graduation. They were too busy getting on with their lives and taking jobs.

ROWAN: No, I don't remember any special graduation. No. I've kept massive notes here. Did you feel part of campus life? Yes. Did you have a job? Yes. What other activities? Well, of course with a new baby, they were somewhat hampered.

DONIN: Mmm.

ROWAN: But we used to picnic, and we used to walk. Oh, for a while a friend lent us a little car. It was what we called a three-wheeler.

DONIN: Oh!

ROWAN: And we'd take it and go picnicking or, you know, just driving around the country lanes in the woods and so forth. And that was mostly, you know, time that we had, we could do. That was before the baby was born, of course.

DONIN: Some people had victory gardens I understand, too.

ROWAN: Oh, yes. Could we have had? Might have done. I can't be positive, but I've always loved gardening. So there's a possibility.

DONIN: Any other notes there?

ROWAN: No, but I want to say again that I think the college did an absolutely admirable job for our young people. I really do. And the fact that you could work if you wanted to was excellent too.

DONIN: Well, everybody needed to earn money in those days, coming back.

ROWAN: That's right.

DONIN: Now did Charles stay connected to his class after he graduated?

ROWAN: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Even though he was absent and his education was sort of chopped up into these two sections.

ROWAN: Yes. Yes, he did.

DONIN: He did.

ROWAN: Yes. Definitely. Oh, yes. And we came back, I know, as often as we could, depending on where we were living.

DONIN: Did he keep any friendships with some of the other veterans that you all met when you came back as a married couple who maybe were living in South Fayerweather or some other housing?

ROWAN: Oh, yes. Well, there was Joann and Ronnie King. That wasn't very long. But here was one couple. John and Edie McClintock. Harry and Peg Hampton. Actually, they keep in touch. Harry Hampton keeps in touch with me now.

DONIN: He's the one that told me about you.

ROWAN: [Laughter] Of course he was. Oh, he's a character. And then there was a Shirley and Bob McGowan and Don Cole. That's quite a group.

DONIN: Yes. But they weren't all necessarily '45s. They were just the friends that you'd made in South Fayerweather.

ROWAN: Yes. Mm-hmm. Yes, we did. They were really—they were happy times. They really were.

DONIN: That's what everybody says. Coming back after the war...

ROWAN: Yes, and so many young married couples. It made the transition for me much easier.

DONIN: Did they spend a lot of time talking about their war experiences?

ROWAN: No. Not really.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

ROWAN: No. Nobody made it a leading conversation. No.

DONIN: So they didn't share war stories.

ROWAN: Well, there might have been, oh, where were you? Or what did you do? And so forth. And then that was settled, and that was it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Other things to talk about.

ROWAN: Other things, yes.

DONIN: Right.

ROWAN: And of course I did have—I did have bouts of homesickness. But after all, that's perfectly natural.

DONIN: Mmm.

ROWAN: You know that takes—Well, even a few years and never completely disappears. Of course I've been awfully lucky in that I could visit my family over there, kind of regularly.

[End of Interview]