

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Gordon Thomas '49
By Mary Donin
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DONIN: Where'd you get the name the name Punchy?

THOMAS: Well, I got that from a guy in the class of '48. He's still very active in college affairs. Marvin Axelrod from the Boston area. And he roomed with Larry Goldman who was from New York City, who's now a lawyer. And back in those days the Lindy Hop was very, very important. And if you didn't know how to do the Lindy Hop, you were a social outcast.

DONIN: This is a dance?

THOMAS: A dance. A jitterbug. And they had a lot of—house parties always had big bands here and big dances. It was a big thing to go to a dance. And I didn't know how to do the Lindy Hop, so I was determined I was going to learn how to do it. And I remember there were no girls on campus. So we didn't have partners to dance with. So I got the record player out. We used to call them Victrolas. And this was in Butterfield Hall. And I lived at the end, 110. And I had the music going with something like *String of Pearls* or something that you could jitterbug to. And I was trying to learn this little triple step you had to do. A little triple step to be able to jitterbug. And what I would do is grab the doorknob on the door to the room, which would swing and be like a counterweight. Because you had to have a counterweight when you jitterbugged. Because you leaned down. And if I leaned down with no counterweight, I'd fall down. So I would be practicing this triple step with the door. And Marvin came back from class one day, and I'm out there doing my thing with the door. And he says, "Jesus Christ, you're punchy as hell!" And it stuck. And that was it. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's great. Because I noticed even in the 50th reunion book, they're still calling you Punchy.

THOMAS: Yes.

DONIN: Is it a name that's used just among your classmates, your Dartmouth classmates? Or is it still—

- THOMAS: Classmates and others in the class of '50 and the class of '48, the adjacent classes, yes.
- DONIN: Right. Great. Okay. So tell us, you matriculated here in the fall of '45?
- THOMAS: No, in July of '45, early July. Yes, right around the 4th as I recall.
- DONIN: Why were they bringing you in early?
- THOMAS: It wasn't early. They were on a three-semester system then. They were going around the clock; it was during the War. And remember this was—the campus was peopled by V-8 and V-5 and ASTRP. They had a lot of military programs going. So the vast majority of the campus was in the military. And they don't take summers off. So we had one term that went from early July to the latter part of October I think.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- THOMAS: Then from maybe early November; that one ended sometime early March. And then you had one—there was usually about a week off between the terms. And then you had another one in the spring that went into June. So our class of '49 matriculated three times. In March the first group came; and I think in that yearbook it shows there were 49 that matriculated in March of '49. It was interesting, 49 and '49. The biggest group of us came in July because we had finished high school in June. We came up here in July. And then a few came the end of October, early November. And that constituted the class of '49, those three matriculations. I know that when I matriculated in early July of '45, Ernest Martin Hopkins was the president. I have a feeling by the time the third wave matriculated, it might have been John Sloan Dickey. Because I remember him being inducted as president in our freshman year.
- DONIN: That would be about right because I know he did start around November of '45.
- THOMAS: So it could be that that third wave matriculated under Dickey, but I'm not certain of that. But I know we all graduated under John Sloan Dickey. And we all took the Dickey course in Great Issues that he instituted for all seniors. It was required—I guess it was the only time they'd ever had a required course for seniors. It was always in your early years you had the required courses. But it was

an excellent, excellent course. And they had wonderful lecturers back in those days. I think it's too bad they gave it up because it was an experience that everybody on campus had, every senior.

DONIN: It's one of the great Dickey legacies, I think.

THOMAS: Yes.

DONIN: Was the Great Issues course.

THOMAS: Wonderful, wonderful course.

DONIN: And you read three different newspapers?

THOMAS: That was your textbook was newspapers.

DONIN: Right.

THOMAS: And being up on current events and everything. I don't know how they got some of the speakers. They had some marvelous speakers like Archibald MacLeish was here. I think— it seemed to me Dwight Eisenhower came. They had a plethora of fine, fine statesmen and speakers and so forth. So you really got quite an education from that course.

DONIN: I think a lot of them came through his connections at the State Department.

THOMAS: That's right. Because he had been with the State Department before he came up here. And also there was—as I recall there was a writing requirement. Because I remember writing something for Great Issues, and I had a lot of fun with that because it was a different form of writing. It was sort of almost like newspaper reporting. It taught you different ways to express yourself. It was really a—I was fortunate to have that; people before us didn't have it. We were the first class to be involved in Great Issues.

DONIN: Well, you were his first graduating class.

THOMAS: That's correct.

DONIN: You were Dickey's first graduating class.

THOMAS: That's correct. Yes.

DONIN: So tell me about—When you first got here, what dorm were you in?

THOMAS: I was in Butterfield.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: They only had a few dorms for civilians. It was Butterfield, Russell Sage, New Hamp, Topliff, and Wheeler, I think.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. All the other dorms were military?

THOMAS: I think the others were Navy. I know the whole Gold Coast was Navy. And Hitchcock. It seems to me there were a lot of Marines in Hitchcock. And the Mass row was all Navy. I'm not sure about the Fayerweathers. I don't remember.

DONIN: My understanding is the Fayerweathers were actually turned over to the—there were quite a few married men that were coming back with wives starting in about '45.

THOMAS: That could be. And then they built Sachem Village and Wigwam Circle for the vets that came back married. But I think you're right. I think initially they had to convert some of the dorms into—I don't know what they did for cooking facilities, though. They must have had hotplates and iceboxes.

DONIN: They installed very modest little kitchenettes, I think, that were sort of mini—as you say, small hotplates and small refrigerators. So do you mind repeating the story you were telling me before we turned on the tape about who your roommates—who the two guys were down the hall from you?

THOMAS: Oh, they were right next door. In fact when I mentioned how I got my nickname, that was in the second term of my freshman year. The first term the guys next door were two discharged Army Air Force lieutenants who got out early on points. They had a lot of missions, and they were sort of crazy. I mean they worked hard, studied hard. But on the weekends they played hard, too. And there was a little airstrip down in White River Junction, private airstrip. And they'd go down there and rent these Piper Cubs and have mock dogfights over Hanover. And they would even fly under Ledyard Bridge, which then was much higher off the water because there was no Wilder Dam back in those days. They did a lot of

crazy stunts like that, and they survived. They moved to another dorm or maybe they moved to a married facility. I don't recall what happened to them.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: But they were there my first term, these older seasoned veterans. And back in those days where the Simon Pearce shop in the Hanover Inn is, that used to be like a tavern. They converted it to a tavern when these veterans started coming back. And it was like a beer hall. [Laughter] And the veterans were old enough to drink. So they'd go down there, and they'd have beer. And I remember my father had gotten out—he'd been in the Army for four years, I guess, World War II; they called back the reserves. And he got out in June of '45, just before I started college. And I remember purloining his combat jacket, which had all the Seventh Army insignia and all these ribbon-type things on it. And I'd wear that, and they would let me into the tavern down there so I could have a beer with the big boys. [Laughter] I remembered my father's war stories so well that I could recite them, and they thought I'd been in the Seventh Army and gone from North Africa, to Sicily to Italy, France, and then to Germany.

DONIN: [Laughs] Great!

THOMAS: I looked a little young for it. But somehow I pulled it off.

DONIN: Did you feel any sort of dichotomy in the class or on the campus between all these sort of returning war veterans and you still wet-behind-the-ears young freshmen? I mean, what did that do to the feeling of cohesiveness on the campus?

THOMAS: Well, it's a little difficult for me because I left after two terms and went in the service as a number of us did. And then I was gone for a year and a half and then came back. And by the time I got back, it was pretty well integrated. Fraternities had returning vets, and they had young people in it. So it was a mixed bag. And of course a number of the vets were married. And a lot of those did not join fraternities. They just lived with their wives off-campus in either Wigwam or Sachem. But I don't remember—when I was first here there was definitely a dichotomy. You had the military, and they had their own—certain courses that they took and had to take that didn't involve us. And they had parades; they had things they had to do in the center of campus and everything like that. We could be playing

pool or ping-pong or something while they were out there marching around, doing their thing. And there wasn't too much interaction between the military and the civilians. We knew them in class. That was where the interaction would be, in class. I wasn't on an athletic team. But if you were on an athletic team, you would have interaction because they also played sports, played football, basketball, baseball. But by the time I got out of the service, it was pretty well melded together.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you left in '46 to join?

THOMAS: March of '46.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: And a lot of us did because we—the reason we were up here in July of '45 is we weren't yet 18. So we weren't draft bait. But during that first year you became draft bait. And I became draft bait in January of '46, but they never took you until you finished your term. They deferred you to the end of your term. Then they sent you your notice, your draft notice. And a bunch of us, instead of waiting for the notice, sitting at home—because you knew you weren't going to get the next term in—we enlisted. And so we'd know when we went in, and we'd know when we were going to go out. And in those days, at that point in time, you could enlist for 18 months.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: So you had a finite beginning and a finite end. And it worked out perfectly because you got—I think I enlisted on March 13th, and I got out on September 13th, and the term started like say September 25th. So you just got out of the service, put on your civies, and came up to Hanover. It worked out. So you really—so I only lost one year, calendar-wise, because I had two terms accelerated, and that just worked out time-wise. So I graduated just one year later than I would've normally graduated, in '50.

DONIN: Did you get any credit for your military service, any academic credit?

THOMAS: No, none. They didn't do that then.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: Not to my knowledge.

DONIN: So you actually didn't get your degree until 1950.

THOMAS: That's correct.

DONIN: That was the year President Eisenhower, I think, spoke at commencement. Was he your commencement speaker?

THOMAS: Yes. I think that's right. Yes.

DONIN: He came up and toured the Grant with John Dickey.

THOMAS: Yes. And who was it? It was somebody in our class was up at the grant. He cooked eggs or something for them. But he had an interaction with Dwight Eisenhower up in the grant. I can't remember who that is.

DONIN: Oh.

THOMAS: Somebody in our class.

DONIN: So was it hard for you to watch your class graduate in '49 and you had another year to go?

THOMAS: Not really. There were so many of us. There were an awful lot of us that went in the service in March of '45 or April—I mean March of '46 or April of '46. Some waited until they got drafted in April or May. And a bunch of us enlisted. The ones that were drafted got out long before us because there was a demobilization. So if you look at it that way, I made a mistake because if I'd been drafted, I would've been back—I don't know as I would have been back in time, whether it would have made much difference really, come to think of it. Because if I'd been in a year, I would've lost—been too late to get back in until fall anyway because they didn't do the summers after 19... I guess '45 was the last summer they had summer term. I think they went back to a regular schedule after that. I know we had the first Winter Carnival since the war began. They stopped having Winter Carnivals during the war. And they reinstated it in February of '46. And they had the outdoor evening up in the golf course. They flooded it and made a big pond up there for the skating evening. I think that was the last year they did it in the golf course. They moved it to Memorial Field. They flooded the football field and made an ice rink there.

DONIN: Oh.

THOMAS: Sometime they might have—because I was in the service. When I came back from the service, it was in Memorial Field.

DONIN: So they didn't use Occom Pond for skating?

THOMAS: They used to, and maybe— But I remember the outdoor evening was on the golf course. They had a little pond there.

DONIN: Wonderful.

THOMAS: But, see, it wasn't a big huge carnival in '46. It was just getting started again. I don't even recall if we had snow sculptures that year.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: Because we still—that was still a very small civilian population on the campus.

DONIN: Right.

THOMAS: And I'm sure that the V-12s and the V-5s didn't have time to do snow sculptures. They had to march.

DONIN: Right. Oh, can you tell the story about the fellows, the entrepreneurial friends who set up the dating service, so to speak? Was that in connection with Winter Carnival?

THOMAS: That was our first Winter Carnival. And it was Bill O'Reilly—Dick O'Reilly. Dick Reilly, Don Mosé, and Bill Jones. And they were all from the Midwest. They were from around Chicago. Bill Jones was from Milwaukee. He was the Jones sausage guy; I mean that was his family. Oh, there was another guy involved with them: Bob Kurland, who was in our dorm. They set up what they called the Winter Carnival Date Bureau and wrote letters to all of the girls' schools—Wellesley, Smith, Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, Goucher, Pine Manor. I mean it was all the women's schools. Saying, would you like to come to Winter Carnival? Which was quite a social event for a young lady to go to Winter Carnival because it was the most famous Winter Carnival in the country then. And said send in your specifications. And they had a word for it. But what they wanted to

know was how tall you were, how much you weighed, what was your bust size, and that sort of thing. And a picture. And then the guys would go traipsing up to their rooms, and they had catalogs of these pictures and resumes. And they'd go through it, and they'd say, "Geez, that one looks interesting." And then they would communicate with each other. By then it was not by phone; it was by mail. And if things worked out, they invited them up for Carnival. And the guy next door to me, I remember, he got his date that way. And in her picture she was an angelic-looking girl. She got up here, she was a pig. She was really ugly. [Laughter] I don't know where she got that photograph. And he was the perfect gentleman. He really was. He had been brought up to be a gentleman to ladies. So he stayed with her all weekend and took her to all the things. And he was just dying. And I remember we went down—they put them on a bus or a train at White River Junction, and off they went. And he went back. He was a very serious guy. Went on to med school and everything like that. But he was always very serious and serious about things. And he went back, and he got a bottle of bourbon, and he drank like a pint of bourbon. Got sicker than a dog and passed out. That's the way he got rid of his frustration from the weekend. But that was quite an experiment.

DONIN: [Laughs] Now in those days, you had parietal hours, I assume. So where did the women stay?

THOMAS: You had to find lodging for them off campus. There were a number of homes where people would take in women to stay. Down South Main Street there was a place called the Blue Shutter Inn, which maybe had room for six or eight. And then there was what was Buon Gustaio Restaurant. That was the Green Lantern Inn.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

THOMAS: Then of course you had the Hanover Inn.

DONIN: Did faculty open their homes to women?

THOMAS: They may have. I don't recall ever doing that. I remember there was a woman down on East Wheelock Street, and the house was sort of set back; it wasn't right on the road. And it seems to me their apartment was on the second floor. She had like a bunkroom, and she'd take in several. Her name was Polly; she was a neat gal. And she'd take a number of them. Because the schools would not let these gals come up here unless they were sure they were staying

in a proper place and they were properly chaperoned. You had to have a place for them to stay or they weren't allowed out of jail, so to speak. What was Polly's last name? She ended up moving to Etna, I remember that. So there were places around that you found. Of course, the Norwich Inn was in existence then. The Lyme Inn which became Alden Country Inn later on was in operation. There you had to have a car because you couldn't get back and forth and there weren't too many people with cars. It wasn't like when I got out of the service and camp back and house party weekends you turned the fraternity houses over to the women. The guys moved out and doubled up in the dorms with friends of theirs. But you see, the fraternities weren't open during the war. They were closed down. I can't remember where my date for Carnival ever stayed. I remember finding a place for her. And you went down to White River Junction and met the train and the B&M came up from Boston and it was another B&M that came up from Springfield and they all came together there in White River and you either got in a bus to Hanover or piled into a cab. There weren't many cabs in those days that I recall. Not many people had cars. In fact, freshmen were not even allowed to have cars on campus. Two classmates and I violated the policy by buying two Model T Fords. One was a big touring car and one was just for parts. One was... I think it was a 1918 Model T. It was an open touring car with a canvas top and then we had a later model Model T that wasn't in operation, but we used to have for spare parts.

DONIN: And you brought it up here to campus?

THOMAS: Nope. Bought it up here. Bought it for \$15. [Laughter] Five bucks apiece. We couldn't afford more than five bucks apiece.

DONIN: Now wasn't there gas rationing at that point, though? It must have been expensive to run it.

THOMAS: Not a Model T Ford. They didn't take much gas, and you didn't go very far. I think by then the gas rationing must have been off.

DONIN: Off, right.

THOMAS: That was in the fall of '45. That car ran. I drove it town to Rye, New York, in that October break, I remember. And then when we were driving it back, I was having problems with it. And I left it at my grandfather's in West Haven, Connecticut. And I ended up taking the train back, and my partners were furious with me for leaving our

car down in— So I had to hitchhike down there the next weekend and get the car. Of course my grandfather was a tinkerer. He got the thing going.

DONIN: Great.

THOMAS: Just made it work good.

DONIN: You guys must have been very popular on campus with a car.

THOMAS: Oh, we had a lot of fun with it. And then I guess the other two guys took it down to Colby one November. They hadn't put anti-freeze in it, and that thing froze up, and the whole engine went to pieces. So we ended up selling it to some swabby, some V-12 guy who wanted to buy it. And I think we sold it for \$20. We sold it for more than we paid for it. [Laughter] It wasn't even running.

DONIN: Okay. Let's go back to the academic side of things. When you matriculated here, do you have any memories of professors who made a real impression on you or classes that you took?

THOMAS: I took in freshman year, I remember I took calculus. But I can't remember who that—it was math. Because math was considered a science course. You had a science requirement. And I can't remember the professor there. Then I also took a very advanced course in French because I had done very well in French in high school. This was sort of a conversational and writing course. And there were only about four or five of us in the whole course. It was a wonderful professor. I am trying to remember his name. And then I took Spanish, Spanish I and II. I took two language courses. And then we all had to take English I and II. And I think English I was the study of the Bible. We had to study—that was the textbook. Then we had to take social sciences. I think I took sociology and government. Seems to me those were my freshman year courses. French two terms, Spanish two terms, math two terms, English and social studies.

DONIN: Uh huh.

THOMAS: And you had requirements most— Well, I guess freshman and I think sophomore year, too, were required courses for the most part. Then you went into your major.

DONIN: What was your major?

THOMAS: I majored in sociology.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Now you selected that when you returned?

THOMAS: Oh, yesddd.

DONIN: Yes. And was there a PE requirement, phys ed?

THOMAS: Oh, yes. Yes, we had the old guy Doc Pollard was the—he was the doctor for the football team at the football games. And he had a—he'd had infantile paralysis, so he had sort of a somewhat game leg. He had a built-up shoe. And he used to—he was a game guy. And he had a thing you had to take where you went up and down two or three steps. Like a stress test. And they took your pulse rate right after you were finished. Then you rested for like a minute or whatever it was. And they took it again. And depending on how fast your pulse rate dropped from the high down after a certain rest determined something on his formula. And then if you passed this, you could take anything you wanted for— You had to take some physical education. But you didn't have to do calisthenics. So I remember I passed it. So I took—in fall term I took tennis. And in the winter term I took skiing, I guess, because I wanted to learn. I didn't know how to play either one. But a lot of people had to take calisthenics because they flunked the test. But physical education was— But when I came back from the service, if it was a requirement, it was certainly not a requirement for veterans. But it may have been just a freshman requirement.

DONIN: Right.

THOMAS: I know it was in our freshman year.

DONIN: So what about your extracurriculars? Were you active in, you know, the Outing Club or—

THOMAS: I was a member of the Outing Club. I wasn't particularly active in it. I went to some of their cabins and did some hiking. But I wasn't a big thing in the Cabin and Trail or Ledyard Canoe or anything like that. I partook in those events. But my roommate was quite a glee clubber. He had come from Cleveland, and he was a very good singer. He was a first tenor. And so he convinced me I ought to join the glee club, which then rehearsed over in Rollins Chapel. And Don Cobleigh was the director of the glee club then. And he

practically dragged me over there. I said, "Bill, I don't sing. I never sung in my life." "That's all right," he said. "If you can crawl in there, you can be in the glee club." Because it was all civilians, and they didn't have very many people to pick from. And so they made me a second tenor. And I don't think we had any trips back then. We just sort of sang on campus. I was in the glee club freshman year. And when I came back from the service, I did not rejoin. But by then, they had plenty of choice, and they got real good singers. And I never sang again 'til right before our 40th—45th—reunion; and a classmate enlisted me and some others to start up an alumni glee club to sing at our reunion.

DONIN: Great.

THOMAS: And that thing has continued on and grown. It's now the University Chorus of the Upper Valley, and we sing in Spaulding every June for reunions.

DONIN: Oh, I didn't know that.

THOMAS: That was started by Ort Hicks, who was a class of '49. You could not say no to Ort Hicks. I mean he would hound you, dog you and you'd say just in desperation, "Okay, I'll sing with you. I'll sing with your group." [Laughter] And when that thing started, I think well over half of that small alumni glee club were '49'ers, his classmates. And the others were mostly '50 because those were the two classes we were going to sing for at reunion. And then it grew. We got George Barr, whom I think was class of '45, and had sung with Fred Waring. He was quite a musical guy. He became our director. And the thing just evolved. And then we started taking in non-Dartmouth and Princeton—people who'd sung in glee clubs at Princeton, Brown, Harvard, Lafayette, Purdue, you name it. Now Annapolis, West Point and so forth.

DONIN: Oh, terrific.

THOMAS: So it's pretty broad-based now. There are about 45 in the chorus now. All male, all old. I think the average age is over 80 now.

DONIN: That's great. Great.

THOMAS: But that all started with Ort Hicks back for our 45th reunion, whenever that was. That was a long time ago.

DONIN: Right. Now if the fraternities were shut down at that point, when you first—

THOMAS: There were no fraternities going.

DONIN: There were no fraternities. What was your social life?

THOMAS: Well, they had—they didn't have Collis. But they had—they called that building College Hall. And it was like a student hangout down in the basement, as I recall. Good question. I guess you made your own fun.

DONIN: At that age, at that point, 18, you were able to drink, right?

THOMAS: Not when I came up here. I was 17. Most of us were 17.

DONIN: Right.

THOMAS: The drinking age was 18 in New Hampshire at that time. But, you know, it wasn't a problem because in the fraternities, they always had beer kegs down in the basement. And the ABC for New Hampshire was not doing anything back in those days. As long as you kept it in the fraternity house, they didn't pay any attention. Later and later on, then they started enforcing it and all kinds of problem arose. But I don't recall any age problem. If you were at Dartmouth and you were in a fraternity, you drank beer. But that's about all you drank back in those days.

DONIN: Did you find your social group, before you enlisted, was mostly other civilians?

THOMAS: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Or did you also mix with the—

THOMAS: No, mostly civilians. Yes. And people in your dorms or a neighboring dorm. And of course you had intramural sports. I mean you'd have touch football between this dorm and that. A lot of that was your social activities.

DONIN: Where did you eat?

THOMAS: We ate in College Hall. They had commons, which is now that big room with the big fireplace. That was for freshman eating. And the

upperclassmen ate in Thayer. And that was pretty much where you ate all your meals. Well, I know in freshman year because I worked in the dining hall. I got my meals for free by working. So I always ate there. But when I came back out of the service, you could get a meal card or something at Thayer, and they'd punch it. You didn't have to eat every meal there. So you'd eat in places in town. They had the Indian Bowl, which was about where the bookstore is now. Or I guess where that coffee house—what's the name of it?

DONIN: Dirt Cowboy.

THOMAS: Dirt Cowboy. I think it was in that—right about in there. And then across where there was a place called Doc's or something like that was over near where The Gap is now.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

THOMAS: And then you had several little restaurants like that. You'd sit in a booth or on a stool, and it was a hash house. It wasn't anything fancy.

DONIN: So it's not where Lou's is now.

THOMAS: Lou's was there.

DONIN: But it used to be called Mac's or something like that?

THOMAS: No, Mac's was up the street from it.

DONIN: Oh.

THOMAS: Yes, there were several of these places. And most of them had—you could buy meal cards, and you'd go in, and you took the meal, whatever it was that day. [Laughs] You didn't look at a menu or anything. You sat down. It was hamburg and mashed potatoes and some carrots maybe, and that was your meal. And there was a place called the Hanover Diner. It's down where—behind the post office, right there on Lebanon Street. And it was where Hanover Park, is that the name of it?

DONIN: Oh, that office building? Yes.

THOMAS: Yes. Well, it's retail shops.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

THOMAS: In there somewhere. And it was a diner. And it was a skuzzy place.

DONIN: [Laughs]

THOMAS: And you could get a plate of spaghetti there, I remember that, for 25 cents.

DONIN: My goodness.

THOMAS: And a glass of beer. It was the only place in town you could buy beer was the Hanover Inn or the Hanover Diner. And Hanover Inn of course had liquor and everything. But the Hanover Diner, they would sell a beer. And I think it was a nickel for a beer.

DONIN: Oh!

THOMAS: It wasn't a very big glass. But a plate of spaghetti, a beer, and a piece of bread for 25 cents, I remember that.

DONIN: But again, during your sort of social time while you were eating, it was mostly with your classmates, not with the military guys.

THOMAS: Oh, that's right. The military— In fact, I guess, coming back, I think the military were eating at Thayer.

DONIN: When you came back, did you feel that it was easy to sort of get back into the mainstream of college life mixed up with all these—

THOMAS: No, it was not. Because when I came back, there was no room in the inn. I didn't have a room—they had a place for me to go to classes. But they had no place for me to live. And I ended up getting a room off campus way down at the bottom of the hill on East [West?] Wheelock Street. It was an old farmhouse. People named McDonald owned it. And other classmates of mine that went out of the service at the same time, they were all off on School Street or—you just had to compete the best you could for where you could live. And it was a pretty lonely existence because you'd walk all the way down there and you're there all by yourself. There's no camaraderie. And that was that whole sophomore year. While I was down there, there were two rooms that they let out. One was mine. And one was—there was a doctor at the VA, Ray Somebody-or-other. Nice guy. He was from Ireland. And then after the fall

term, he went on down to some mental—actually a prison, I think it was, in northern New Jersey where he was a doctor in a prison. Because I remember visiting him down there at one time. And so a guy that I had gotten to know through some others who were living in Richardson, he was living off campus somewhere. And I said, "Why don't you take Ray's room? And then we make one room a study room, and the other room a bedroom." Because there were two rooms and a bath there. And it made sort of a nice suite. And that was a little better because you had someone you could talk to. Otherwise you had to walk all the way up the hill in the wintertime—that was pretty cold—to visit other friends on or off campus. But then by junior year then I went back into the dorm. I went into Richardson.

DONIN: Did you join a fraternity?

THOMAS: Yes, in sophomore year. But mostly—you had to be a senior pretty much to be in the fraternity house. They had a limited number of rooms, and the seniors had priority. Maybe one or two juniors would sometimes be allowed to come in because they had room for them. So I lived in the fraternity house in senior year, but not before that.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Do you think that was a common experience for the vets returning here after their service that it was hard to get back into the community so to speak?

THOMAS: When you say back into the community, it took a while to get back in because you had to find people. You know you left, went in the service, so did the other people, and you never knew when they came back. They sort of filtered in and then you see Joe's over there in Richardson and then you got the... By the end of the first term back, you were pretty well into the swing of things. You just didn't live on campus with everybody else. So you couldn't say, knock on the door of the guy next door and say come on, let's go get some lunch or something like that because there wasn't anybody there. They just didn't have... They had all these veterans coming back, a lot of them much older than I am that came back from Europe and the Pacific theater and they had to accommodate them.

DONIN: Well, it was the GI Bill at that point, right?

THOMAS: Yes.

- DONIN: So they hadn't necessarily started here at Dartmouth. They were just coming to Dartmouth for the first time.
- THOMAS: Well, some had started and gone in the service and been there for three years and coming back. Some were coming for the first time. And a lot were on the GI Bill, as I was when I came back.
- DONIN: Uh huh.
- THOMAS: Which is the greatest thing that ever happened.
- DONIN: An enormous opportunity for everyone.
- THOMAS: You know what the tuition was when I entered here in 1945?
- DONIN: I should know that and I don't.
- THOMAS: It was \$450 a year! And it was still that in 1947 when I came back. Because the GI Bill gave you \$500 a year towards tuition. And you could use it towards tuition and books. And I remember that I paid \$450 in tuition and I had fifty bucks left over for books and if you bought used books, you could do it. And then they gave you seventy-five bucks a month for living while you were here, like October through June or whatever it was, and with seventy-five bucks you could pay for your room and your meals. It was fine.
- DONIN: Amazing.
- THOMAS: It was amazing how far you could stretch a buck back in those days. And then of course you worked in the summer and earned some money which wasn't too easy because there were a ton of veterans out there all competing for the same summer jobs. In fact I think it was in the summer of '48 and I could not find a job. And a friend of mine had the same problem so we... And I had a Model T Ford.
- DONIN: Is this a new one? Another one?
- THOMAS: Another one. Oh yeah, I loved Model T Fords. And it had a truck back on it and I remember we put a sign on it, Odd Jobs Incorporated. Of course we weren't incorporated. And a phone number, his phone number and my phone number. And I said we will do anything. Well, we got everything. I mean, the jobs that we got. We painted houses, we cleaned out some woman's cathouse;

she had fifteen cats. It was the most awful job I ever had in my life. But we made some money. We did pretty well and then he got a job I remember as a waiter at the American Yacht Club in Rye and so he was making good money there. I think they paid \$15 a day for lunch and dinner. You worked awfully hard though; you didn't stand around at all. And then he got me in there as a dishwasher and then I got promoted from dishwasher to waiter so the business sort of went by the boards because we had steady work.

DONIN: Yes.

THOMAS: Those were interesting times because there were a ton of veterans and they were all coming on the GI Bill and were competing for colleges and competing for jobs and everything. It took a while for all that to... for the smoke to settle.

DONIN: Now did you say you were here for VJ Day?

THOMAS: Uh huh. Oh yeah. I definitely was here. That was in August of '45.

DONIN: So you had just gotten here?

THOMAS: Yeah, I was here a little over a month when it happened.

DONIN: Any memories of that?

THOMAS: Oh, vivid.

DONIN: Do you remember when you heard it on the radio or whatever?

THOMAS: Oh yeah. Everybody of course was glued to the radios for news in those days because the War was still on and we knew about the bombs being dropped and everybody knew that the end of the War was coming. And when Japan capitulated, there was huge celebrations. Parades, spontaneous parades on campus. I remember up North Main Street in front of Parkhurst and people screaming and hollering and waving flags and passing bottles. I remember there was a lot of drinking went on. I remember I had on that Army jacket of my father's and I remember we had sparklers and the sparks got on the jacket and burned holes in it.

DONIN: Oh!

THOMAS: I remember that. Little tiny holes. Most of the people that I was... A lot of us were the ones who went into the service the following March. Same crew. I remember my roommate was a very serious diabetic – he was born that way – and he had to take insulin shots in his leg every morning and Bill got into the swing of things and was drinking somebody's whiskey or something like that. And I came back and he was in bed and of course I was five sheets to the wind myself and I said to myself, Oh Bill, I gotta get him under the covers. Can't let him lie there. So I started trying to get him under the covers and of course rolling him around, he got sick all over the floor. So then I go get this other guy down the hall from me, Johnny Simpson. I said, Johnny, I need help. Bill's puked all over the floor and it's all over him and I gotta get him in the shower and wash him off. I remember we got him in the shower in the dorm in the cold water and he curled up like a kitten and slept right there with this cold water on him. Somehow we got him to bed and the next day, he felt fine the next day. Of course, he didn't have a hangover because he got rid of it all. And the next day, I remember him saying to me, boy, you saved my life. I said, why? He said, you know, I shouldn't drink because that stuff turns to sugar and I would have gone into a diabetic shock and would have needed a shot of insulin but I would have been passed out and I wouldn't have had it and I probably would have died if you hadn't tried to put me to bed and made me get sick. And he died eventually... Diabetes took him when he was about 65 I think. He had lost some toes. He went through the same diabetic program that most people with that kind of diabetes had. But I remember him telling me, he says, well... It ran in his family and he said none of the men in his family ever lived to be 65 and he beat the odds. I think he made it to 65 or 66.

DONIN: So that was a big celebration.

THOMAS: Oh, it was big night on campus, yes. They suspended classes and...

DONIN: Did Hopkins make a speech?

THOMAS: I'm sure he did.

DONIN: But you don't remember. [Laughter]

THOMAS: I don't remember much at all. I do remember the parades. I think they had some musical instruments; there was like a band playing and there was a lot of celebration going on because the War had

been going on four or five years. So it was a long time. People were so happy to get it over with.

DONIN: Any memorable deans that you had encounters with?

THOMAS: Oh yeah. Well, we had two deans. There were only two on campus then. Neidlinger whom we called Needlefinger. [Laughter] And he was the dean of the upperclassmen.

DONIN: Right.

THOMAS: And Bob Strong was the dean of freshmen. And Bob and I were very good friends which you shouldn't be with a dean. Because I had, back in those days, you had your classes Monday through Saturday. Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. And they had eight o'clock classes. I don't think they have eight o'clock classes any more and they don't have Saturday classes any more but then they did. And that particular winter term I had six eight o'clocks.

DONIN: Ooohhh.

THOMAS: And I had a problem waking up in the morning and so I slept through a lot of eight o'clocks. I had that term I think 220 cuts.

DONIN: Oh!

THOMAS: And I was constantly in Strong's office and I think if I hadn't gone in the service I probably would have been put on probation the next time because I remember my averages the first term – this was on a four-point system – was 2.8. Then it went down to 2.0. Then it went up to 3.0. Then it went to 1.8. Then it went to 3.4. Then 3.2. Then it stayed up there but I was like a yo-yo there. There was something about that winter term that just devastated me. I couldn't wake up in the morning.

DONIN: Too cold and too dark. [Laughter]

THOMAS: Yeah. I couldn't get out of bed. Dean Strong was a wonderful guy though. He would see the humor in things that some people would not think was very funny. I remember one time – and this was at the end of my second term – and of course by this time, because of all my cuts I had gotten to know Bob Strong pretty well. When I was a freshman, you didn't furnish your own room. The college

purchased furniture for students when they went in the service and everything, so they furnished the room. I had this lovely dark green leather chair in my room and stenciled on the bottom it said, property of Dartmouth College or something like that. We had a guy who was in our class who we called Freddy Freshman and he was only about 15-1/2 or 16. He was much younger than we were. You know, a child prodigy, that sort of thing. He wanted to be a professor, a nuclear physicist, something like that. His name was John Waugh. We used to call him Waugh Who Waugh and John lived down the hall from me in Butterfield. And I'm getting ready to go in the service and he was really a green freshman and I said... He'd come in in November. He was one of those few who came in the last wave. I says, John, I'm getting ready to go in the service. Do you want to buy a chair? And I sold him the leather chair for \$15.

DONIN: Oh! [Laughter]

THOMAS: And helped him take it down to his room. Well, we had a campus cop then named Nelson Wormwood.

DONIN: Wormwood?

THOMAS: Wormwood. One security officer on all the campus. We called him Wormy. And Wormy had a fantastic nose. If there was a girl in a room... House party weekends there were a couple of hours a day you could have a girl in the room. Other than that women were not allowed. He could smell one from a mile away. He had an uncanny way of ferreting out violations. Well, he came in of course and he sees... He had keys. He went in all the rooms. There was no privacy then. He sees this chair in John Waugh's room and he reports me.

DONIN: Uh oh.

THOMAS: Well Bob Strong gives me this lecture about honesty and this. Now, he'd given me a check for it and I'd never cashed the check. And we were laughing about it. How we got Waugh-Who-Waugh... And Bob Strong got very stern and he was giving me this lecture and finally he started laughing and he says, maybe you'll grow up and sell the Brooklyn Bridge! [Laughter] He was a wonderful man. He had a sense of humor and also humility. He was just a very human person.

DONIN: That's great.

THOMAS: Some other dean might have said, this is terrible and we are going to punish you and everything like that. Of course, I was going in the service and that cured a lot of problems for a lot of people. I know a classmate of mine, he died a couple of years ago, named Kenny Wheeler, and he was a very good friend of mine freshman year and he didn't do too well in the fall term and he got put on probation. And he was here with his brother. Both of them were freshmen. And Ken, at the end of our second semester, or after his first semester, was put on probation. His brother was too. And then at the end of the second term, his brother Hub, Hubbard Wheeler, was told not to come back. But Ken was going in the service and they allowed him to come back after his service break and he made it through one more term and then he flunked out and went on to finish his schooling at Babson as I recall. But, yes, the service breaks was ointment for a lot of wounds, I think. They sort of overlooked a lot of the things and said, when you come back, if you do all right we will forget all those bad things you did before.

DONIN: Well, I suspect most of you came back very different people. More mature; you went out as boys and came back as men.

THOMAS: Well, yeah, more mature but you still... You came back still more gung-ho, Joe-college type stuff, football games and all. It didn't change any of that and maybe you enjoyed it even more. I suspect we did. I can remember... You know, this building we're in right now was a movie theater back in those days because the Nugget had burned down and I can't remember when that burned down. I know it was in existence in the summer of '44 because I remember coming through here in Hanover and it was here then. Sometime after '44 it burned down.

DONIN: Before you started as a freshman, had it burned down?

THOMAS: I'm not sure whether it was while I was in the service. It was sometime between '44 and when I came back from the service that it burned down. Because Webster was the movie theater and it had those hard benches. And I remember the only movie I ever walked out of in my life was here. And I remember going to... They had a seven and a nine o'clock. I went to the seven o'clock. Some movie called "The Godfather." It was around Christmastime. About these bandits out in the desert in Arizona or somewhere and they find this little baby and of course, it was a takeoff on the Christ Jesus. It

was an awful movie and I remember coming out and people all lined up to get into the next show and we all came out before it ended and we went [mimics a gesture] and the crowd just sort of disappeared. Nobody went into the second show. [Laughter]

DONIN: Well, Webster Hall was used for movies I think and lectures. I mean there was no Hopkins Center. That was a long way off. That wasn't built until the '60s I think.

THOMAS: That's right. Yeah, most of your activities were in Robinson, the top floor of Robinson was where the Dartmouth Players put on their... because I was in the Players freshman year. Not as an actor but I worked behind the scenes. Hopkins' daughter was in the Players. The women that were in the Players they had to come from the community because we didn't have any women. What was her name?

DONIN: Ann, I think.

THOMAS: And she was married to a guy who was an ensign or a first lieutenant in the Navy. I remember that. He was off in the service and she had his car which was a, I think it was a Packard V-12. It was a sports car with a long cowl on it and cutaway doors. It was a gorgeous car. This was in the summertime. It was warm. I was working at the Players and got to know her and she let me drive that car! I'll never forget that in all my life.

DONIN: You're driving the car of the president's daughter?

THOMAS: Yeah. Well, she was part of the Players. She was very active in the Players. Remember, this was a small campus then. There wasn't a lot going on. So if you were in the Players, you got to know everybody in the Players and you were like one happy family. But the women – professors' wives and people like that were the ones that had to take the female roles in any plays you put on because that was all you had.

DONIN: And I think sometimes the guys were playing the female roles.

THOMAS: Sometimes they had to, yeah.

DONIN: We have pictures of them.

THOMAS: And it was tough because it was up in the top floor of Robinson and no sloping floors and I think just folding wooden chairs. And you put your productions on. But they did a pretty good job with it. You were asking about activities. I did that in freshman year and I did the Glee Club.

DONIN: I assume there were not a lot of activities that normally were probably offered before the War.

THOMAS: That's right. During the War there was not much going on. There probably was a band. But then after I came back, then I remember they had the WDCR, the Dartmouth radio station. WDBS we called it then. And a friend of mine was active and he got me involved in that. Because I did a show with one of the veterans' wives who lived down here in Sachem Village next to the high school. Carolyn Gilchrist and we were Mr. and Mrs. Parker and we had to write the scripts. I think it was a half hour once a week and it was a situation comedy with music but you had to make the body copy flow into the title of the music and then you'd run the platter and that sort of thing and I had a lot of fun with that. But it was awful because the first few times it was easy to come up with lines but after a couple of months it was getting tough to come up with ideas. But we managed to do it.

DONIN: You were doing this once a week?

THOMAS: Once a week. A show a week.

DONIN: Yeah, that's a lot of pressure.

THOMAS: Yeah, I would go down to Sachem Village and sit in their living room and we'd work on it down there because it was quieter there and less interruptions. And her husband Joe didn't seem to mind this at all. I think he was at the engineering school. Yeah, there were some aberrations that you don't see on campus now. I had a number of friends at Wigwam Village and they'd invite you down to go have spaghetti. I mean, they didn't have much. They didn't have steaks or things like that. I remember those buildings. They were like army barracks buildings. Two story framed and there was no insulation. The wind would go right through the building.

DONIN: I gather the heat wasn't great.

THOMAS: No, it wasn't. You wore sweaters all the time. But they all managed. They all seemed to have a great time. They were young married and were having a good time.

DONIN: What I'm curious about is if while you were here there was so little social interaction between the civilians and the veterans, how is it that your class now is so.... When did it happen that everything coalesced into one unit and you all felt members of the same class?

THOMAS: Well, remember, they put a lot of V-12s went through here, a lot of Navy went through here. Some Army but mostly Navy. A number of those were here by sufferance and not by choice. They were assigned Dartmouth and if they didn't finish their education here, they never came back. A number of our classmates that were here at the time that weren't here by choice so to speak were never involved in anything at the college afterwards. But I would say the vast majority of them became part of the college and the mentality of it and the history of it. It's really difficult for me now without going through the yearbook or something to figure out who was who.

DONIN: Ah. It doesn't matter any more.

THOMAS: It doesn't mean anything. That's right. I mentioned Ted Krug down at... Well Ted was class of '42 and ended up in class of '49. I didn't know Ted – I probably met him in college but I got to know him. He was living in Florida and we used to have a winter mini-reunion down in Florida every year. It was right near where he lived. And so I would call him and say why don't you come join us for dinner or something? He would never have wanted to join us for the golf outing because he lived on a better golf course than we were on. [Laughter] So I got to know Ted quite well and became very good friends. But a lot of the friendships you developed over the years were people you hardly knew or didn't know at all when you were in college.

DONIN: I see. Uh huh.

THOMAS: And it's the way things sort of pulled together.

DONIN: So now the veterans vs. the civilians doesn't mean anything any more.

THOMAS: I really couldn't identify... I could identify by knowing who I knew in freshman class who entered with me as a civilian. But I can't

remember all of them. And there wasn't a total division. There was interaction but they had their own dorms and they had their own special activities so there wasn't that much opportunity for a melding of the two groups.

DONIN: And they weren't participating at all in the sort of Dartmouth traditions.

THOMAS: I'd say most of them, no. Some did. Some played on the sports teams. There were some in the Glee Club. I think it was a little more difficult for them because they had their military science courses as well as their college courses and they had their exercises so their free time was a little more valuable to them than to us. I just really couldn't distinguish them today.

DONIN: Uh huh. Well, I think that's it.

THOMAS: OK.

[End of Interview]