

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with John Wildman '47
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: What are the circumstances that brought you to Dartmouth?

WILDMAN: That's quite an interesting story. I was at sea at the time. My ship came into New York. I'd been at sea for a year. I knew that I had one week's leave. My best friend was a signalman who also had that, but he lived in the state of Oregon. He had a week's what we call leave time, travel time. So he had two weeks; one to spend traveling. So he said, You have to make sure, if you want to go back together that you were there at the same time. And you could go back together which we wanted badly to do. So he said, "John, you find a way that you can delay until that week is there, and then we'll go back together." So I looked around and thought how could I delay? Well, they were having this story for V-12 out there, and I found out, yes, I could. Because they would hold you there while they were testing for it. It just so happened they were doing that once every four months. This was the week that they were testing.

DONIN: For the V-12?

WILDMAN: For the V-12 program. So bang! I'll try that, but of course I'll never make it because this is for some other people. So I went. I had physical examinations. I was interviewed by about ten admirals. All these things happened in that one week, and I passed.

DONIN: Fantastic!

WILDMAN: So my friend came back from Oregon. He said, "What are you going to do?" "Oh," I said, "I found something here that I didn't expect. But you're never going to see that on that ship again." But anyway, so how in the world—I've always said I have a guardian angel that takes care of me.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So let's establish this in time? This was in 1943, early 1943?

WILDMAN: No, this was September. The V-12 program had been going for two semesters when I started it. Yes.

DONIN: Okay. And what had put you— Backing up a little bit, you said you were coming back from sea. You were already in the Navy?

WILDMAN: Oh, gosh, I was a couple of years in the Navy.

DONIN: Okay.

WILDMAN: I was what—you'll hear me talking about saltwater sailors.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: And I've got a story on that.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

MRS. WILDMAN: But you were assigned to a Liberty ship. He was on a Liberty ship.

WILDMAN: I was on an oil tanker. Gasoline tanker, too.

MRS. WILDMAN: He was a radioman.

DONIN: Now had you joined up right out of high school?

WILDMAN: Oh, no, no, no. I graduated from high school in 1939.

DONIN: Oh, alright.

WILDMAN: So it was early '20s.

DONIN: Alright. So let's go back to the ship. So you passed the V-12 test. And what came next?

WILDMAN: I'm on a train going up to Hanover. Dropped me off in the middle of the night.

DONIN: All by yourself?

WILDMAN: Oh, yes, I traveled all by myself.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER : Why don't you talk about how you got to Hanover. Why you were at Dartmouth and not another school.

DONIN: Yes, how did you get assigned to Dartmouth?

WILDMAN: Yes, yes. I had applied for another school.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

WILDMAN: Worcester Tech, I wanted because I don't know. I never really had an opinion because I have a sister who was a graduate student, did graduate work, at Yale. And she was in New Haven. My birthday present was always tickets to the football game, and it was always the week that Dartmouth came down. Now, being in the Yale family, I did not root for Dartmouth at that time. [Laughter]

DONIN: It's understandable. [Laughs] But then you found out you in fact were going to Dartmouth instead of to Worcester.

WILDMAN: I was quickly converted.

DONIN: Uh-huh. How?

WILDMAN: Well, it's a lovely place up there. I liked the people I was with. Let me get into my pit here. I found out very interestingly enough that—and I throwing my figures that I think are fairly good. That probably about 85 percent of the people were all fresh out of high school.

DONIN: Right.

WILDMAN: They had been recruited from high school because they were building that program up in a hurry. And they found out they were successful in getting that underway. It was a miracle to get that going. Probably about 5 percent what we called saltwater sailors; people who came in from the fleet. And I was in that group. And I've left out 10 percent?

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

WILDMAN: The Marine Corps.

DONIN: Right, right.

WILDMAN: The Marine Corps was there. And I think it's astonishing because I saw these marines hanging around. And I looked at a Guadalcanal patch on every single one of them. These were all veterans of Guadalcanal. Tough, tough guys. Now how did you get the Marine

tough guys, the saltwater sailors, and these kids out of high school and put them all together?

DONIN: It's a big challenge.

WILDMAN: It worked pretty good. I always said, from time to time we had some snow fights going on. And I can remember one night when I think that there was a lot of hard snowballs made because there was a little bit about what was Kristallnacht.

DONIN: Oh.

WILDMAN: They had windows. It was like Kristallnacht over in Germany. But we got along well together because I think we kind of ignored one another.

DONIN: Did you sort of stick... I mean did the saltwater sailors sort of stick together and the marine guys stick together?

WILDMAN: You couldn't help it because we were... I was in Lord where it used to be a room for two people. There were four of us.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: Three of them were high school kids. We got along well together.

DONIN: Did you?

WILDMAN: Yes. I think that they gave me a lot of respect simply because I knew how to march, which they didn't know about. Well, actually one of my roommates wound up as being my—introduced me through him to the woman I married.

DONIN: Amazing.

WILDMAN: That's a story in itself.

DONIN: Did you meet her while you were training at Dartmouth?

WILDMAN: No, no. This was after the war was over.

WILDMAN: And you stayed in touch with him.

WILDMAN: Oh yes. We were good friends. I was... He was my best man and I was his best man when we got married. He came from Natick [MA] and he introduced me. He knew people up there and actually there were a couple of people in between. And the story is... Got a minute?

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: OK. When I met her on a blind date, I was immediately impressed with her. Because I was in my twenties now, probably thinking in terms of marriage and stuff. Right off the bat I said, This is a pretty girl. We'd gone together for a while. And finally I received one—coming up from Connecticut to see her—I got a letter from her saying, “John, I’ve got news for you. I was having an affair with a guy—a relationship—with a fellow who was a captain in the United States Marine Corps during the Korean War. And we were not engaged, but we were kind of engaged to get engaged. But he had to go and spend one year in Korea. He went over there.” But the understanding was she could—Connie could do anything she wanted, but when he came back they would pick up where they left off. She said, “John, he came back. It’s been nice knowing you.” Oh, so I went home, slit my wrists and that sort of thing.

DONIN: Oooh.

WILDMAN: And I don’t know how long it was before—it was a fairly short time—I got another letter from her, and she said, “John, it didn’t work. Would you like to meet again?” Whoom! I was up there. [Laughter] Three months later we were married 50 years ago.

DONIN: Oh, nice. Yes. You said the three roommates, were they all headed towards the same service?

WILDMAN: They were all in the Navy as V-12s.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: Now, this gets into another point which is on my little list. As far as I don’t understand, I could never understand why that as a high school person, no, all—any of us, you spent two semesters together and then you moved to another college.

DONIN: In the V-12 training?

WILDMAN: In the V-12 program. Yes. For example, my guy, whom I say was my good friend, came from Worcester Tech. He'd been two semesters there and had two semesters in Dartmouth. One of my best friends from the other one was sent to Bucknell. And most all of our group then went to Bucknell. They were all happy as could be because Bucknell was coed.

DONIN: Yes. Right.

WILDMAN: Yes. But I don't understand how or why that was ever done. Doesn't make much difference. I stayed, though, because somewhere along the line I'd been asked about my opinion, I said I want to be an engineer. So they took Thayer as a different school. Instead of Bucknell, I stayed there behind as in a different school. Rotated from Dartmouth to another school. I don't know why.

DONIN: Hmm. So you were there for how many terms or semesters?

WILDMAN: Well, let's see. I went up there in March of '44. I left right after the end of the war in September of '45. So about a year and a half. And I think—because when I went back to Dartmouth, I went back as a second semester junior.

DONIN: Oh, junior? Uh-huh.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER: Because it was an accelerated program.

DONIN: They were going year round at that point. And they were sort of squishing the calendar a little bit. So when you came back, it must have been a very different place. There was a new president when you came back.

WILDMAN: Oh, I want say that being in a Navy barracks, which was what Lord was at that time, winding up in Sigma Alpha Epsilon was quite a difference.

DONIN: Nice.

WILDMAN: And I have to remember which one I'm talking about: before the war and after the war, during the war.

DONIN: Right.

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: Well, let's finish hearing what it was like before you left. What was your day-to-day routine?

WILDMAN: Well, I wanted to point out, too, that there was discipline in Lord. All of the barracks then. And I've forgotten whether it was a saltwater sailor they put in charge or whether it was somebody from the staff or not, but we had control. Our room was inspected every single day. Every day we went out and did calisthenics. We were formed in a line and marched to all of our meals to and fro. And more important, when they had—always had a review on Saturday when we'd all go up to the Commons, line up. It was just like Annapolis. The commander would come down, look at your shoes, look at your haircut and get an opinion, you'd lose—demerits and all that sort of thing.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: And at the very end they had a band, the school band, playing John Sousa's music. And we'd parade by. And as you went by the commander, you'd salute him and eyes right, and he'd salute back. But then when it was over, you were through for the rest of the day. Didn't have to come back 'til Sunday night.

DONIN: So this was on Saturday?

WILDMAN: You were dismissed at noon on Saturday, and you had the rest of the weekend off. Unless you had demerits for something you did wrong.

DONIN: So did you generally leave campus, or did you hang around? You left.

WILDMAN: I had a home in Montreal.

DONIN: Oh.

WILDMAN: I had met a very nice young lady up there, and I spent a lot of time with her. They didn't have rationing in Canada at that time with the meat. And I was welcome at her home. They used to give me a canned ham which I would bring back and then pass on to my family in Connecticut.

DONIN: Fantastic. Yes. How'd you get back and forth? There was gas rationing.

WILDMAN: By train. Oh, wonderful connections. Just whip over to White Flower Farm; the trains ran every hour.

DONIN: White River Junction. Yes. The people in your social group, your roommates and such, did they all leave campus, or did everybody take off and evacuate?

WILDMAN: I think I was the champion. [Laughter] But of course Dave Wilcox, my roommate, lived in Boston, the Boston area. So he used to go. Hitchhiking was a simp. Go out there, stick out your thumb. Bang! Pick you up and take you.

DONIN: Really. And it wasn't dangerous in those days.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER: A man in uniform then. Yes, you would always pick up.

WILDMAN: Let me tell you the one that was dangerous. I was hitchhiking back from Boston by myself one night—or one day. And I was stopped by a car, a big beautiful modern Cadillac or something. And there are two men sitting in the front seat who quickly identified themselves as French Canadians.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

WILDMAN: And the next thing I know, I'm sitting in the back, and that car's going 90 miles an hour. So I said, What the devil is going on here? Oh, we have a bet with somebody in Montreal we could make it from Boston to Montreal in the time that we were going to do that. Okay, now you may or may not recollect that in Lebanon, there is kind of a mountain there before you go down into the city. We were coming up the top of the hill, and bang! There was a car pulled across the road, and there's a blockade. There are police with guns. So they get out, and what's going on here? They say, "Sorry, John, to tell you, but they had robbed a bank, and we were hoping to stop them. And we were expecting there might be a gunfight."

DONIN: These guys that you were riding with?

WILDMAN: No, no. The police that picked us up.

DONIN: Oh, oh, oh, good.

- WILDMAN: The police thought that my drivers were robbers that I was with. And they were carrying me as hostages if they needed me.
- DONIN: Oh, God! Unbelievable.
- WILDMAN: So I said, "I'm just a sailor." "We recognize this. Come over here and give us your name. We'll need you for a confirmation of some kind." Never heard from them again.
- DONIN: So when you were there initially, that was when President Ernest Hopkins was the president.
- WILDMAN: All the time I was there. And I'm trying to... Tell me his assistant, kind of a Dutch name.
- DONIN: Was it Neidlinger, Dean Neidlinger?
- WILDMAN: Neidlinger, Neidlinger. That's the name I'm looking for. He was the saint who sent me off. Because I, again, it turned out I know afterwards, they took care of—they discontinued the V-12 program very quickly, just as fast as they could. And they peel you off in terms of marks. The people who didn't have the marks left first. And I went to him, and at that time I was having some D trouble. But he said, "Better go back to the Navy."
- DONIN: Uh-huh. So that's why you left.
- WILDMAN: That's why I left. Because my grades... I found Thayer School was a lot tougher than I thought.
- DONIN: Right, right.
- WILDMAN: I liked it. On paper we were building a road on one of the old lanes over there. We'd go out with our equipment and survey it and do all the cut and fill on this. And plan on how to make a highway out of that road. We had to go out and locate the North Star to see this kind of thing so we could find where Hanover was. I liked it. But—
- DONIN: It was tough going.
- WILDMAN: I've always said if I'd had a little hand calculator, I think I would have been okay. [Laughter] In those days you had a stick which you used—

DONIN: A slide rule, wasn't it?

WILDMAN: Yes. Oh, gosh, yes. [Laughter] It was a big difference.

DONIN: Yes, big difference.

WILDMAN: But when I went back after the war was over, I had all of my basic courses in. All the toughies were done, physics and all that stuff, was all done. So I just picked up interesting courses.

DONIN: So these were sort of your electives that you were doing when you came back.

WILDMAN: Electives, yes. I had a year and a half of electives and had the time to be a good fraternity man.

DONIN: Oh, that's great. Now when you came back, I mean had you joined SAE before you left?

WILDMAN: Oh, gosh no. No, no, no. I don't think they were even open at that time. There were hardly any civilians there during the V-12 program.

DONIN: Right. Not many.

WILDMAN: There were some there, but... And they mingled with us and went to the same courses. But they were, you know, one in a hundred.

DONIN: So you joined SAE when you came back? It was up and running again.

WILDMAN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Now did you have to do any sort of formal application to Dartmouth when you came back?

WILDMAN: Oh, absolutely.

DONIN: That was part of that test you took, you were just saying, right?

WILDMAN: Oh, that test, I think they were using that test to support what I was saying. But I was just a new man. That was not an automatic thing

in any way, shape, or form. Being in the V-12 program, they gave me credit for the courses, but no more. No more.

DONIN: You didn't get any points for your military service or anything?

WILDMAN: Not to the best of my knowledge. Maybe... I can't answer that for sure. Because it seems to me everyone that came back was veterans.

DONIN: Just about.

WILDMAN: Oh, gosh, yes.

DONIN: So you came back in what, what did you say?

WILDMAN: It was March of '46. 'Forty-six, yes.

DONIN: And that was... Well, there may have been some—I think they were letting in some regular, you know, civilian freshmen right out of high school at that point. Do you remember that?

WILDMAN: I don't remember. I would imagine so. See, I wasn't dealing in classes with those anymore.

DONIN: Because you were at Thayer by this time.

WILDMAN: No, no. When I went back, I didn't go back as Thayer again.

DONIN: Oh, you didn't.

WILDMAN: Oh, no, no. I knew academically I was having trouble. I went back and did nothing but easy courses. [Laughter] I did— what's the honorary society?

DONIN: Oh, you mean Phi Beta Kappa?

WILDMAN: Yes. And my grades at that time were at that level. But of course they evened them out because I didn't have a lot of minuses in there. But I did nothing but A and B work because I did nothing but easy things.

DONIN: Right, right.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER: Well, they're easy for you, Dad.

- WILDMAN: Easy for me, yes, yes.
- DONIN: And also don't you think, I mean a lot of veterans have said this, that they were better students when they came back after their military service because they were more mature.
- WILDMAN: Everyone in the world, starting with the faculty, said that these were the best students they ever had at the college.
- DONIN: Yes. And you were very focused they said.
- WILDMAN: Very, very focused. Yes, yes, yes. I was with a good—the class of 1947 was a good class there. I'm sure its records were pretty good.
- DONIN: Yes, yes. Did you know at that point what you wanted to do when you were going to leave Dartmouth?
- WILDMAN: Gosh, no. I wanted to be a history teacher, and I think I had something that corrected papers up there. Something that you used to go on. But in those days I needed the money.
- DONIN: Right.
- WILDMAN: I needed the money. And the college didn't pay much in those days.
- DONIN: They didn't.
- WILDMAN: And I got a job in industry that paid me very quickly and was a good source for me.
- DONIN: But you had a job at Dartmouth then when you came back, correcting papers?
- WILDMAN: Oh, gosh, no. I think that was open to me, and I can't remember the details because I wasn't too interested. Because even though I thought it'd be a good life up there being a teacher, I needed something that was going to pay a lot more money.
- DONIN: Yes, yes. And of course you had the GI bill at that point, right?
- WILDMAN: Hmm?
- DONIN: The GI Bill was paying your...

WILDMAN: Oh, they paid for me during the period when I went back between the two, between my period at SAT. Oh, that worked out pretty fine. I had some savings, and that didn't pay quite enough to go. I had bonds, and I cashed one bond a month for that time. I could say that I'm probably one of the few people at Dartmouth who graduated with no money from home, no tuition, nothing. I had the GI Bill of Rights. And I worked summers, too.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

WILDMAN: So I graduated from Dartmouth without a penny in debt.

DONIN: Right. That's wonderful.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER: But you ran a tight ship when you were up there. I know you've said that, yes.

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: You mean he pinched pennies.

WILDMAN: I was very careful.

DONIN: A lot of them were. I mean everybody said they had no money. They continued to wear their uniforms after the war because it was the only clothes they had.

WILDMAN: I don't recall that. I don't recall....

DONIN: We have photos in the archives of students who were no longer in the military but they were wearing their uniforms.

WILDMAN: I personally don't recall that. Personally. Maybe they did. But I know we had some... I had a classmate that was in the Air Force who had 23 kills.

DONIN: Wow.

WILDMAN: As a fighting plane. We had another fellow that was blind and had a seeing-eye dog. He'd been blinded in the war. We always had trouble with him because with a seeing-eye dog—and I'm quoting now—"You couldn't be a pet."

- DONIN: Right. No, no. They're on the job.
- WILDMAN: It was a chain, you couldn't have a pet. And we always thought this guy was not being very nice to this dog. And he was doing what he was not supposed to. It broke our heart to see the dog kind of abused. In a way abused. He didn't get any love and affection.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Did you find that the fellows who saw a lot of sort of violent action wherever, did they talk about that a lot? Or did they not want to?
- WILDMAN: Not a lot. But again it was part of—things would remind you. I had one guy that was one of my best friends. Came from a nice family down in Westchester County. Came from quality people. Not rich, but well taken care of. He went into the Army. I think it was—he landed in Normandy on D Day as a private. Wound up crossing the Rhine when the war was over as a captain. Battlefield promotions. Now here's a guy that's got a lot of pretty good statistics to him. And obviously, next thing you know, he's got a pretty German girl over there. And he had...couldn't convince that woman with the thought that the kids were being taught by Hitler on being socially were ground in so deep, that he with his qualifications was having trouble convincing her that the United States was better than Germany.
- DONIN: They'd been brainwashed.
- WILDMAN: Yes, brainwashed, clear brainwash. But, oh, God, he was a great guy. He had a dog, too, but his dog was a pet.
- DONIN: They had pets on campus? The students did? The students had pets on campus?
- WILDMAN: Mmm.
- DONIN: Ah-hah. Lots of them, huh? Lots of dogs.
- WILDMAN: Well, yes. Don't they allow dogs anymore? We did in the SAE house all right.
- DONIN: I guess if you're living off campus you can have dogs. I don't about the dorms.
- WILDMAN: Would SAE be considered off campus?

DONIN: Probably.

WILDMAN: That may be what the deal was. Some different than Lord.

DONIN: Now when you came back then, there was a new president of Dartmouth. It was—

WILDMAN: I think I was there with Hopkins. Didn't he last as long?

DONIN: No, he retired in 1945, and John Sloan Dickey was the president starting in 1945.

WILDMAN: Dickey was the one. Yes, yes. Okay.

DONIN: He was the young fellow from the State Department who took over from Hopkins.

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: In 1945.

WILDMAN: Okay. That's—bingo. Yes, yes.

DONIN: Do you have any memories of him at all?

WILDMAN: I had very little to do with him.

DONIN: Right, right. Well, you were focused on finishing your school work and moving on.

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: Which was the case with many of them I think.

WILDMAN: Yes, I did but I just don't remember it.

DONIN: Now you mentioned to me when we were talking on the telephone planning this visit that you were going to tell me about the strength training that you had to do.

WILDMAN: Oh, yes. I have my little list here.

DONIN: Oh, good.

WILDMAN: Okay. Once every term, which was four months units—

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: By the way, we had plenty of activity that when I was there during the Navy days. We had exercise courses in the gymnasium, not in the dormitories. You had to go down there, and they had a strength test in which there was a whole series of things that you put yourself through. Things like chest-ups and sit-ups and all sorts of things like that. Some of them you have to do how many you could do in a given time. And you had a numerical counter for this. How many could you do if you wanted to do them forever? And always the one I remember the most, at the very end, they had a big thick rope that went up—this is in the gymnasium—went up to the ceiling of the gymnasium, which was probably about 18 feet tall.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: You had to shimmy up that. Now you didn't have to get up to the top top. But you had to go to a certain distance to it. But believe me, you had a lot of exercise by that time. But if you failed that, that numerically—

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: —you were back with the fleet.

DONIN: Whoa!

WILDMAN: There was no excuse. If you were not keeping up to them physically, you were back to the fleet. I passed it all right.

DONIN: Good for you.

WILDMAN: Yes, yes, yes.

DONIN: And that was every four weeks you had to do that?

WILDMAN: Yes, once a month, every four weeks. Every four weeks you'd have to go down there and do that.

DONIN: And did some of your friends not pass?

- WILDMAN: I don't remember that. But I can remember also we used the gymnasium for testing, exams.
- DONIN: Oh, yes. Right.
- WILDMAN: And I don't know whether they still do that or not. But they'd go down there, and there's a big hall with rows and rows and rows of chairs and all. And they had proctors going back and forth to make sure nobody was cheating.
- DONIN: Right.
- WILDMAN: One guy was cheating, he was not necessarily a friend of mine but in the group. Bingo! He was out of it.
- DONIN: He was gone.
- WILDMAN: He was caught cheating, he was gone.
- DONIN: Yes.
- WILDMAN: I know you had to elect to have a sport assigned. And I know I wound up in boxing.
- DONIN: Oh!
- WILDMAN: I don't like boxing. But in the end you know you had to do some real boxing with other people to pass it. You know that was....
- DONIN: So everybody... Some sport was mandatory for everybody.
- WILDMAN: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Oh, yes, yes. I did wrestling another time because I liked wrestling; a little less dangerous than boxing. I didn't like to hurt people.
- DONIN: Now when you were there, was Dartmouth actually playing sports against other schools? I mean was there a football team and a hockey team?
- WILDMAN: There was a football team. I don't recall any football games when I was there. There were some very quickly after the war was over.
- DONIN: Yes. Right.

- WILDMAN: And I know that we had a captain of the football team who had been badly disfigured in an airplane crash. His name escapes me. Terribly. A sad story because his airplane had crashed and he'd been thrown clear of it, away from it, safe. And he saw that there were two people back in the airplane. So he tried to go back to save them, and the airplane blew up in his face.
- DONIN: Oh....
- WILDMAN: He was badly disfigured. But as far as—and he was having facial surgery all the time. But, you know, as far as we were concerned, we got used to it. But he was the captain of the football team after the war was over. And I think we didn't have a great team, but we had some fun.
- DONIN: So what else is on your list there?
- WILDMAN: The tree. They had a tree down on the Commons.
- DONIN: Yes?
- WILDMAN: And at the end of each month, I guess it was, if you had bad marks of some kind or other, they put your name on a tree. So you would go down there and read through that thing to find out how you had passed. Now it doesn't make sense to me, but I know what it meant to go down to the tree and say, Whew! I'm free. See, if you're on the tree, you're probably going to get some demerits which meant you couldn't get off on the weekends. Possibly you might even be expelled. I've always wondered whether that was part Dartmouth or just during the Navy when your marks were posted on the tree rather than sending you a report card.
- DONIN: So these were grades that were weekly, monthly, or every term?
- WILDMAN: I think it must have been every term probably. Probably every term. But it was like a report card you'd get in other places at schools.
- DONIN: Yes. And this was down on The Green in the middle of town.
- WILDMAN: Right down on the Commons, right by the fence, fairly close to the fence there was a tree in that general area.
- DONIN: Okay. What else is on your list?

WILDMAN: How about the duckboards?

DONIN: Oh, the duckboards, yes.

WILDMAN: I say I was so impressed with the duckboards because you come through a cold winter, and you're ready for spring. But I found out afterward the problem is that the whole, not just Hanover, but a big area had been under a dam. They had a glacier down to the south, and that was a glacier made that lake for a thousand years. So it was nothing but sediments that came down. And it's a unique kind of soil, and it's flat; there's no drainage off it.

DONIN: None.

WILDMAN: So you're going to get mud there and got criss-cross and criss-cross. So they probably still do it, the duckboards?

DONIN: They've actually... They've brought in some fancy engineers to create these walks that drain somehow. So we don't use the duckboards any more.

WILDMAN: Well, we had those. But that was a sign of spring.

DONIN: Indeed.

WILDMAN: And we were all very glad not to have to go through the mud and that we had something to walk on.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: And that was one of the exciting things. Did I mention Mary Hitchcock Hospital?

DONIN: We haven't talked about that, no.

WILDMAN: We always worried about dating and things of that kind.

DONIN: Sure.

WILDMAN: And at that time Mary Hitchcock had some kind of a military program, too, in which they were training nurses, and they wore uniforms and all that sort of thing. Numerically they were a very tiny number of gals up there compared with the guys. So it was pretty hard going. [Laughter] I think these girls were pretty selective, and I

wasn't— But one of my other good friends met and was dating one of them and eventually married her.

DONIN: Oh, that's great!

WILDMAN: Yes. So we were always so envious of him who had a nice, pretty— They had a word for the training nurses. But they didn't have to march.

DONIN: Did you stay in touch with the.... The people that you knew when you were training there with V-12, was one group.

WILDMAN: That would be my best friend at that time, Dave Wilcox.

DONIN: Right. So when you returned after, in 1946, those people weren't there, were they? I mean you had to start all over again sort of.

WILDMAN: There were a couple. Now wait a minute. I take that back. I don't know as there's anyone had quite the same.... There were some, yes. Dave Wilcox, the one I'm talking about as my friend, who was at Thayer School, he graduated from Thayer School. So he must have had continuity because he did not wash out as I did.

DONIN: So he stuck it through to graduation.

WILDMAN: But I don't remember him being there after the war.

DONIN: Hmm. And he was class of '47 as well?

WILDMAN: As far as I'm concerned, I can't remember anybody in the class of '47 who was also a friend at that time in the V-12 program.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: Right now, sitting here, I can't place anybody.

MS. WILDMAN_SCHRIER: Well, you went back pretty quickly Dad. You were discharged in February and you were back there in March.

WILDMAN: In March, yes. My mind is void on that. Something else on my list: VJ and EJ.

DONIN: Oh, yes. The VE and VJ.

WILDMAN: We kind of passed over the one in Europe pretty much. All we knew now that we'll begin at the end. And there were a lot of people being happy. But the VJ, the last one, came along. We got the word. The first thing the commander gave us, I don't know, two or three days off, to do as we pleased. But on that night people met from all over. And there's never been in my life any kind of a place where the people would meet together in those conditions. So I went over to West Lebanon, and I found a crowd was going crazy over there. Everybody hugging and kissing and drinking, and, oh, it was wild—wild. So I went back, and then I said, wait a minute! So I went back again. And I don't think—I never carried my liquor very well. I probably was kind of stewed at the time. But when I woke up the next day, I had a white uniform on, and it was lipstick from here to here, red lipstick from here to here. [Laughter] I remember VJ-Day.

DONIN: You had a good time.

WILDMAN: I had a good night, yes.

DONIN: Well, there are pictures... Again, we've got pictures in the archives of all kinds of dancing and carrying on going on right on The Green.

WILDMAN: Oh, yes. But I went over to West Lebanon. But it went on everywhere. I probably hit both.

DONIN: Right.

WILDMAN: I probably hit both, yes. It was not like saying go over at eight o'clock and you had to twelve. This was early in the day. We had like 24 hours just going crazy on that, yes.

DONIN: Wonderful.

WILDMAN: Yes. And West Lebanon was where the action was. White River Junction didn't draw us the way Lebanon did in those days.

DONIN: Really?

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: What was going on over there that was so appealing, in West Lebanon?

WILDMAN: Well, I think that they had a younger crowd of people there for one thing.

DONIN: Yes, yes. And more bars probably, right?

WILDMAN: Probably more bars, yes.

MRS. WILDMAN: More women probably.

DONIN: More women, right.

WILDMAN: I found out after the war was over, though.... See, when you were in the Navy at that time, in the V-12, liquor was absolutely taboo. When I went back after the war was over, it was not taboo.

DONIN: Not at all. I gather they even... President Dickey had to open up—create—a bar, a gathering place, in the basement of the dining hall for the older veterans to have a place to drink. Because they were not interested in living under the same rules as the young freshmen right out of high school.

WILDMAN: Yes.

DONIN: And there was no social space for the older vets to gather and drink.

WILDMAN: During the V-12 program?

DONIN: No, no. This was after the war.

WILDMAN: Oh, after the war. The fraternity house took care of me.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: But they had dormitory associations, too.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

WILDMAN: We always had somebody had a car that could go over to Lebanon where there was a different price in liquor by far.

MS. WILDMAN-SCHRIER: So you never did the dining hall liquor stop then?

WILDMAN: No, No, no. But I would help sometimes go get the liquor too.

- DONIN: I see. I see. Was it all veterans in SAE, or did you take in any civilians?
- WILDMAN: At SAE?
- DONIN: Uh huh.
- WILDMAN: No, we had civilians there, I think mostly veterans. But there were some civilians there, yes. See, there were some people who were SAE before the war. And then they came back and went back as returning to SAE. Yes, yes.
- DONIN: Did you sense that people made a distinction in your class between the civilians and the veterans? Or did you all sort of get along?
- WILDMAN: During the V-12 program?
- DONIN: No, afterwards. When you came back.
- WILDMAN: Afterwards. I think of myself as being a veteran at that time. Yes, we had some civilians in at that time. No prejudice in any way. It was just the way it happened. To say that somebody dodged the draft or something like that, not a bit. Not a bit. They couldn't because we were just too many veterans there.
- DONIN: Right, right. But your sense of sort of class unity wasn't impacted by whether someone was a veteran or someone was a civilian?
- WILDMAN: Not a bit. Not a bit, no.
- DONIN: Right, right. And in later years it never...
- WILDMAN: Dartmouth, to say a caste system or anything like that, never either wartime or postwar, any of that made any difference. We had people whose folks had a lot of money. We had people, a different kind. But to say your friends were your friends for what you saw next to you.
- DONIN: Right.
- WILDMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Very democratic in that respect.

DONIN: Right, right. Did you maintain friendships with people who were not part of your fraternity?

WILDMAN: Dave Wilcox, I was talking about, my best friend, he was not in SAE.

DONIN: Oh, interesting.

WILDMAN: Not in SAE.

DONIN: Did he join another fraternity?

WILDMAN: I get a little mixed up on the timing because when I left when the war was over, the next thing I remember was that he had finished the V-12 program and had gone through midshipmen. He was an ensign in the Navy at that time when I was still involved in Hanover. And he was assigned to a cruiser that was doing nothing but driving up and down the East Coast to keep busy because they didn't have any war on.

DONIN: There wasn't any war. Right, right.

WILDMAN: Yes, yes. And I can remember we were going through one of the suburbs one time, and the car broke down. And I was driving the car. And he had to go out and push it to get it off the road. And here he is in his ensign's brand-new uniform pushing a car in Somerville or some of those places. He was not very happy about it.

DONIN: No, I'm sure not. [Laughs] Did a lot of students have cars up there?

WILDMAN: Hardly any.

DONIN: No, I wouldn't think so.

WILDMAN: Hardly any. Hardly any.

DONIN: Gas rationing and the expense of it.

WILDMAN: Well, during the war, none.

DONIN: Yes.

WILDMAN: I'm talking about.... The gas rationing ended the minute the war was over.

- DONIN: Right, right. But even afterwards there weren't many cars, were there?
- WILDMAN: Very few. Very few cars, very few cars. Yes. I had the loan of a car from my sister, and I could get that up there. And I was able to get it to drive to Montreal a couple times.
- DONIN: That's a long trip, especially in those days. [...]
- WILDMAN: After the war was over, Dave Wilcox had been married and was painting his house. And he needed some help with it. And I had a spray gun. I went up and helped him paint his house. And a little while after that, he said, "You know I have a good friend whose house needs spraying. Would you please come up and spray his? Would you do a favor for him?" Sure, I'd do a favor for a friend anytime. So I went up with Dave Wilcox's friend and sprayed his house for him. His wife said, "I have a girl that I know because I work for her father as a small engineer. And I know that she's not dating these days. Why don't you come up and date with her? That was Connie."
- DONIN: That was it.
- WILDMAN: That's how Connie.... Met her through the wife of a friend of a friend.
- DONIN: Right. That's great.
- WILDMAN: Now, that's very unusual.
- DONIN: That's great.
- WILDMAN: Yes. But again, I did a lot of dating back and forth. But in doing so, I picked—
- DONIN: You picked the right girl.
- WILDMAN: Did pretty good. Picked the right girl. Now you can never ask her why.
- DONIN: [Laughs] Now, by the time you graduated, they were back to doing graduation ceremonies, right?

WILDMAN: Oh, yes. I went to what's the—

DONIN: The Bema?

WILDMAN: The Bema. I remember in the Bema, and I remember the Bema so well because I came from an interesting family: [...] Probably economically my family was just about like a new immigrant family just surviving, you know.

DONIN: And did they all come up for your graduation?

WILDMAN: Well, my point was that my father had a great desire for education because he knew he hadn't been able to do it. Neither my mother nor my father graduated from grammar school even. And so my father had died when I was ten years old. So how long was that? Twenty years that my mother probably had seen that I had not been able to live her husband's dream. So I was there, and I said it was the happiest day of her life when she saw me get a diploma from Dartmouth College.

DONIN: Aww. Yes, yes.

WILDMAN: My older sisters had all gone to Storrs Agriculture College.

DONIN: So it was a happy day.

WILDMAN: A happy happy day for her. Yes.

[End of Interview]