

A Fighting Tradition: Dartmouth in American Wars

Curated by Ryan Irving '24

The Dartmouth College community has been involved in every one of the country's major military engagements, from as far back as the Revolutionary War all the way up to the recent conflicts in the Middle East. For centuries, Dartmouth men and women have carried on a storied tradition of valiant wartime service to the United States of America, serving all around the globe and in all branches of the military.

This tradition has evolved over the years, as has the college's identity and the nature of its student body. In the first decade of Dartmouth's existence, its connection to war was primarily through alumni involvement. Over the course of the next two centuries, the college's participation in war efforts grew in scope and variety: it saw the creation of student military societies, facilitated the training of soldiers on campus, sponsored military support services, and allowed students to put their college years on pause to enlist.

National unrest over the country's involvement in the Vietnam War was reflected on campus by the formal elimination of ROTC sponsorship due in part to student protest. However, in the early years of James Wright's presidency, and because his influence at a national level, Dartmouth was afforded the opportunity to support the war effort in a new way: by welcoming veterans to campus as students, along with the wealth of experience and diversity that they brought with them.

CASE 1

Dartmouth and America's Early Struggles for Survival

Dartmouth College had only been in existence for six years before it became involved in the American colonies' struggle for independence. Almost a century later, it saw its sons divide along northern and southern lines to fight against each other in the nation's brutal Civil War. From supporting General Washington directly as he fought the British to training on the College Green before departing to fight in the Civil War, Dartmouth students and alumni took direct action to support military efforts.

Timothy Bedel to John Wheelock, May 26, 1778. MSS 778326.

Timothy Bedel was a prominent leader in the New Hampshire militia during the Revolutionary War. During this phase of the war, he and his men were quartered in Haverhill, New Hampshire, about 30 miles up the Connecticut River from Hanover. This letter, written in 1778, orders "Lieutenant Col. John Wheelock" to take several men to Albany and try to raise funds to support the New Hampshire militia. Lt. Col. John Wheelock was the son of Dartmouth Founder Eleazar Wheelock and would assume the college presidency when his father died nearly a year later.

George Washington to Reverend Joseph Johnson, February 20, 1776. MS-1033, Box 1, Folder 9.

Joseph Johnson was the son-in-law of Samson Occom and a Mohegan who had studied at Moor's Charity School under Eleazar Wheelock well before Dartmouth College was founded. He was instrumental in purchasing land from the Oneida Nation with the goal of founding a Christian Native town dedicated to an integration of Algonquin and Anglo-European culture.

While he was still gathering support and obtaining legal clearance, George Washington wrote to him in the hopes that Johnson would be able to convey a message to the Iroquois Confederacy, known then as the Six Nations. Washington was anxious to convince the Confederacy to stay neutral in the war so that the Continental Army wouldn't face a war on two fronts. However, despite Washington's hope, the Six Nations ultimately

dissolved their confederacy, with some tribes siding with the colonists and the others taking up arms for the British.

State of New Hampshire. “An Act for Raising Eleven Thousand and Two Hundred Weight of Beef Within This State, for the Use of the Continental Army.” [New Hampshire], 1780. Broadside 780377.

This broadside was distributed all across the state by the first “President” of New Hampshire, Meshach Weare. Each town in the former colony was tasked with raising a significant amount of beef in order to feed the Continental Army. Hanover was on the hook for over eight thousand pounds of beef despite having a population that was likely only about a thousand people, many of them either alumni or faculty of the college.

Dartmouth Phalanx flag and canteen. Iconography 22 and Realia 545, Box 28.

The Phalanx was Dartmouth’s first military society and regularly trained on the College Green. This canteen belonged to John Ordronaux, a member of Dartmouth’s class of 1850. Ordronaux’s father was a Frenchman who commanded the American privateer Prince of Neufchatel during the War of 1812.

After leaving Dartmouth, Ordronaux went on to earn a law degree from Harvard and a medical degree from the National Medical College. During the Civil War, he wrote the first American work on military hygiene while serving as a medical intake examiner for new Union recruits.

Riding boots and pistol from the American Civil War. Realia 198.

These boots and this sidearm belonged to Dr. Andrew J. Huntoon, a member of Dartmouth Medical School’s class of 1854. In 1862, Huntoon enlisted in the Union Army as a second lieutenant and was assigned to E Company of the 12th New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry. He rose through the ranks during the Civil War, eventually serving as Captain of the A, D, and E Companies of the NH 12th. On May 3, 1863, Huntoon was injured in battle and taken prisoner at Chancellorsville, Virginia. He was later discharged because of his wounds. Huntoon died in 1923 at the ripe old age of 91 and was buried alongside his wife in Arlington National Cemetery.

“Attention Volunteers!” Zouave Company Recruitment Poster. MS-1409, Box 17, Folder 1.

Henry Atherton circulated this broadside in the vicinity of Cavendish, Vermont, a town nearly forty miles southwest of Hanover. The recent graduate of Dartmouth College’s class of 1859, Atherton was tasked with mustering a hundred volunteers; he raised one hundred and twenty recruits in less than two weeks. He was quickly elected the captain of this company which became rated into the 4th Vermont Infantry Regiment.

The term “Zouaves” refers to a particular elite forces fighting style that was practiced by Berber members of the French Army. Their highly effective martial methodology was integrated with United States drills in the years immediately preceding the Civil War and both sides of the conflict had Zoauve units in service.

CASE 2A
Dartmouth and the Great War

During World War I, the Dartmouth College community initially took on more of a support role than a fighting role. Most alumni who saw action during the first few years of World War I did so as volunteer non-combatants, usually driving ambulances for the American Ambulance Field Service. Meanwhile, back in Hanover, the campus was converted into an army training camp in preparation for the United States’ likely entry into the fray. Still, despite the lead-up, most alumni and student deaths in the Great War occurred in training accidents or because of complications from the Flu of 1918.

Scraps of canvas ambulance cover, identification plate, and shrapnel. Realia 540, Box 1.

Richard Hall, member of the class of 1917, was the first Dartmouth student to die in World War I when the ambulance he was driving was

struck by German artillery on Christmas Eve of 1915. This piece of shrapnel is from the shell that took his life and destroyed his vehicle, leaving these tattered canvas and metal identification plate that identified the ambulance as “Dartmouth College Number 2”. The college had raised funds to sponsor the ambulance in support of the allied war effort.

Picture of Richard Nelville Hall standing next to Dartmouth College Ambulance 2. From the “Richard Nelville Hall 1915” Alumni File.

Dartmouth Ambulance Corps Application Blank. From the “World War I” Vertical File.

Photograph of Recruits Training on the Green. From the “World War I” Photo File.

Photographs of Occom Trenches. From the “World War I” Photo File.

Under the umbrella of the War Department’s Students Army Training Corps program, and with the aid of Captain Louis Keene of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Dartmouth began training students in earnest for front-line action. A portion of the athletic fields was converted into a realistic trench system named “Occom Trenches”, where Dartmouth recruits would stage mock sorties during football game halftimes.

CASE 2B

World War II: Preparation and Participation

During World War II, Dartmouth College resumed its role of training the nation’s warriors and also supported the war through other efforts while thousands of Dartmouth men either enlisted soon after graduation or put their studies on hold to fight overseas. The school was home to the largest instance of the Navy’s multi-college V-12 program, which sought to train college students in military knowledge. Upon completion of their degree, students would be commissioned as officers in either the Navy or Marine Corps. Many of the Dartmouth men who participated in the V-12 program became

naval aviators. In total, 8,977 Dartmouth men served in the war, representing the Classes of 1902 through 1947. After the war was over, many returned to campus with new wives and families in order to finish college.

Model of the SS *Eleazar Wheelock*. Realia 545, Box 71.

Liberty ships were used as cargo transports by the United States Navy during World War II. They were sped through production to meet the critical need for vessels to carry the personnel, equipment, and material to the Allied fighting men throughout the world.

The ships were named for men and women who had contributed to the greatness of the United States. The SS *Eleazar Wheelock* is shown here, but there were eleven Liberty Ships named for members of the Dartmouth, including Samson Occom. The *Eleazar Wheelock* was built in just over nine weeks before being sent on missions throughout the world, where she survived multiple air and submarine attacks. After the war, the ship was used in a variety of commercial uses before being sold for scrap metal in 1964.

Photograph of Charles “Stubbie” Pearson, Dartmouth Class of 1942. From the “Charles Pearson 1942” Alumni File.

Charles “Stubbie” Pearson ‘42 was the captain of the football and basketball team, valedictorian of his class, a poet, and a member of the Dartmouth V-12 unit. In 1944, he was killed while dive-bombing an enemy ship in the Pacific theater of operations. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, an Armed Forces medal awarded to servicemen who have distinguished themselves by single acts of heroism or extraordinary achievement. In 1967, he was awarded the Sports Illustrated Silver Anniversary All-American Award, which was the first time the award was given in recognition of an individual’s unfulfilled potential.

Front cover of the August 1942 edition of the Dartmouth Alumni Magazine. *The Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*. Hanover, N.H: Dartmouth Pub. Co., 1942. Reference LH1.D3 A5.

This cover of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* showcases the naval aviators from the class of 1942, including Charles “Stubbie” Pearson.

“Dartmouth Men Form Nucleus of Navy Trainees Here.” *The Dartmouth*, April 7, 1943. Reference LH1.D3 D2.

“Women At Dartmouth.” Publisher and Date Unknown. From the “Veterans - WWII” Vertical File.

Following the conclusion of the war, service members returned to Dartmouth to resume their studies. Their wives were the first females that lived regularly in college facilities. This required the school to modify dorms (the Fayweathers) and build new college housing (Sachem Village and Wigwam Circle) to accommodate the influx of married couples

CASE 3

The Vietnam Era and Beyond

During the Vietnam War, The College and its students, like the rest of the nation, were conflicted about what their role should be. Some student organizations protested the war and pressured the college to end the ROTC program at Dartmouth. This effort was mostly successful, with only the Army program remaining as an option for students through a partnership with Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont. It wasn't until decades later that the efforts of James Wright, a Marine Corps veteran and the 16th President of Dartmouth College from 1998 until 2009, brought veterans from across the country to study at Dartmouth, changing Dartmouth's involvement in national conflict from supporting students and recruits in their preparations for war into supporting veterans in their transition from military service to student life.

Front page of *The Dartmouth*, April 25, 1969. Reference LH1.D3 D2.

Dartmouth Students enraged at the nation's involvement in the Vietnam War demanded the college end their Army ROTC program. Following the war, there was a sharp decrease in the veteran community at the college.

“Smoyer lounge to be dedicated.” *The Princeton Packet*. From the “William Smoyer 1967” Alumni File.

William “Billy” Smoyer ‘67 was a member of the soccer and ice hockey teams while at Dartmouth. He was killed in Vietnam in 1968 while serving in the Marine Corps. This article from his hometown paper notes that Smoyer was one of the college’s greatest hockey players and that a lounge in the new Dartmouth College hockey arena, Thompson Arena, will be dedicated to him.

From the “William Smoyer 1967” Alumni File.

While on a trip to Vietnam, President James Wright buried a Dartmouth Hockey puck with a “Semper Fidelis” sticker on it in the rice paddy where Smoyer was killed.

Photograph of President Jim Wright. DL-15, Box 40, Folder 63.

This picture of President Jim Wright was taken for his inauguration as the 16th President of Dartmouth College. Wright, a Marine Veteran, served as president from 1998-2009. While visiting with injured post-9/11 service members, Wright realized that the nation’s top institutions needed to do more to support veterans returning to their studies following military service. Wright worked with Senators on the Yellow Ribbon program in the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which allows veterans to attend private institutions free of financial barriers. Because of his work, Dartmouth and the nation’s private institutions are home to thriving veteran communities.

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Hat created by and on loan from the current Student Veterans Association.

The design of this hat was inspired by the Dartmouth Phalanx logo from the mid-19th century and is worn proudly today by members of the Dartmouth student veteran community to celebrate the college’s military history and their place in it.

Various military awards, uniform pieces, and uniform patches awarded to and on loan from current members of the Student Veterans Association.

These pieces are tangible symbols of the many different rare experiences and challenges that Dartmouth student veterans have brought with them to Dartmouth College. Ranging from the Purple Heart medal to Aviation Unit Patches, Dartmouth student veterans exemplify the vision of bringing a diverse set of veterans by President James Wright. Student veterans bring this experience to the classroom and extracurricular activities to help educate the Dartmouth Community in their unique backgrounds.

Photo of Duncan Sleigh '67, a published pamphlet of his letters from Vietnam, and a photograph of his memorial plaque. From the "Duncan Sleigh 1967" Alumni File.

While a student at Dartmouth as a member of the class of 1967, Duncan Sleigh was a member of Phi Kappa Psi fraternity and an involved member of the Dartmouth Mexico Program. After graduating, Sleigh joined the United States Marine Corps and was killed in action in Vietnam on November 8th, 1968.

While under heavy enemy fire, Sleigh carried two wounded soldiers to a landing zone and coordinated their medical evacuation. When North Vietnamese troops assaulted the landing zone using rocket propelled grenades, Sleigh shielded one of his wounded fellow Marines from the blasts, sacrificing his own life in the process. USMC records indicate that Sleigh's actions saved the lives of five soldiers; he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, the second-highest military decoration that members of the US Navy and Marine Corps can receive.

This published version of Sleigh's correspondence is open to the last letter that he sent to his parents. He died on the battlefield a week later.

Charles E. Widmayer '30. "Navy V-12 Unit Gets Underway." *The Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*, August 1943, pages 16-17. Hanover, N.H: Dartmouth Pub. Co., 1943. Reference LH1.D3 A5.