Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Edwin Bock '43
By Mary Stelle Donin
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BOCK: I came from a high school in Westwood, New Jersey, and it was—my graduating class was 96. It was a suburban town, commuters who went—parents worked in the city. It was a pretty good education. And early on I got into editing the [high school] newspaper. And at the same time we had a professor of—a teacher—in social studies who was part Indian, E.B. Fincher. He has since died, of course. His influence, I think, intellectually was very important. Even in eighth grade we had a very good social studies teacher who took us into New York to hear lectures at the New School. In the thirties New York was a very fermented kind of—Union Square radicals, and I got into that, interested in that, partly through their connection, causing me to go into the city a fair amount. So I came out of high school with a lot of social science, interest in current affairs, politics. And had been the editor of the school newspaper, which was a pretty good paper, looking back on it. I learned to work with type and the Westwood, New Jersey weekly which published, also printed the newspaper, the school newspaper. So I think the two schools I narrowed it down to were Hobart and Dartmouth. Why Dartmouth, I can't really remember, except there was a graduate of Westwood High School who was at Dartmouth.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

BOCK: Then. And I had known him. He was two classes ahead of me. I knew him. He was very high on it. And as it turned out, a very close friend of mine, Ted Hopper, was a class member, '43, was leaving the high school, and we both applied to Dartmouth as well. I applied for Hobart. I'm not sure…. I think Ted Hopper applied to Princeton as a second thing because his older brother was at Princeton. Anyway, we both ended up at Dartmouth. And I found, when I came to Dartmouth, I felt pretty well prepared in terms of writing. Took the English 1A. You used to take a placement test in English. So I started off at the 1A thing there. And as I've been thinking a little bit, knowing we were going to have this interview, one thing I really wanted to say is I've become a kind of a curator or connoisseur or familiar with intellectual history. And I ended up as a graduate

student at the London School of Economics after the war and taught a little bit there. And then got into intellectual things. And I've kept that up since. And when I got to the university in London, I felt badly educated. I mean badly educated compared to undergraduates; I went there as a graduate student. Badly educated in literature. I mean the ordinary English college graduate or actually even prep school, good prep school graduate, knew an enormous amount of classics. And I really felt I was swimming in a new kind of pool here. In the social sciences, of course, I found that I did pretty well. I mean I was—I mean did pretty well in the sense that I had done well…. I got a good education at Dartmouth in the social sciences. And I really wanted to put that on the record. [Laughter] In particular I wanted to mention a professor named John Mecklin, who… We caught his last year. And he used to stand on this platform and just teeter. We thought he was pretty ancient. He was in his seventies. [Laughter] And he had this white hair. And he had been a minister early on. President Hopkins brought him here I think in the twenties. He'd been controversial in Pittsburgh.

DONIN: Yes. He taught sociology.

BOCK: That's exactly right. Yes. John Mecklin, in his course, it was the first course, and the only course, that referred or even made me aware of the existence of a major German master thinker and social scientist named Max Weber, whose tremendous studies…. When I got to the LSE, I knew about him. And it was because John Mecklin had mentioned him. I could place him, where he was in the sort of evolution of thinking about capitalism, socialism, all those things. So I felt Dartmouth had done pretty well in that, for me. And I was not a big student because I spent—my life at Dartmouth was with the newspaper. And it's a way of life. So Sidney Cox, John Mecklin, Hugh Elsbree. I knew Bob Carr, I mean I knew him later in life as well. And he was a junior teacher, so to speak in political science when I was there. So I learned a great deal at Dartmouth that I hadn't… And I got an opportunity to do a lot more in journalism than I ever would have imagined. And I was pretty—I was already quite aware of things intellectually, I think, for a high school graduate. And I certainly didn't get hurt. [Laughs] Which sometimes happens in college.

DONIN: Yes.

BOCK: So my feeling about Dartmouth education is very appreciative. Can I mention some faculty members?

DONIN: Absolutely.

BOCK: Sidney Cox, of course, everybody who's been here will tell you about him. John Adams, a later-comer to Hanover—I think he came in my sophomore, the end of my sophomore year—in the history department as a young teacher. His course was on world affairs. The big thing on campus when I was here was isolationism versus getting ready for the war. When I came, I was strongly influenced by what you would call leftwing thinking, which was that war was a bad thing and so on. And I found at *The Dartmouth* a very congenial atmosphere because everybody at *The Dartmouth*, from the top editor down, Tom Braden and so on, were all strongly anti-war. But, you know, the Germans had—the war had begun when we got here. So my first year at *The Dartmouth*, everything was very isolationist. I mean that was our pitch. We all believed it. It was sort of in us. And then it gradually changed. And that's why to me, in my time, the few hours I've got here to spare, I've been looking at the records in the archives of *The Dartmouth*, the board of proprietors and so on.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

BOCK: To see how—to remind myself—how it changed, that process.

DONIN: I would think that December 7, 1941, would have changed everything.

BOCK: Well, yes. For that I'm glad you…. That gives me an opportunity to say, we put out an extra which hit the streets by eight o'clock. We'd learned about it five o'clock, four o'clock, something like that. And I was covering H. Styles Bridges, Senator Bridges, over in Lebanon, who was speaking on the theme of essentially why interventionism was good. He was called off the platform in the afternoon—called off the platform, came back and said, "I've just been informed the Japanese have attacked us at Pearl Harbor." Looking back, you couldn't ask for a more clinching argument if he were speaking on that topic. So I interviewed him after he left, the speech, and then hightailed it back and wrote the story. And so I—in this classic extra, I've achieved *The Dartmouth* immortality. I've got the byline article on that page; everything else is Japanese starting the war. It was—that certainly changed it. But it had changed before. You know we prepared this—I'm pointing to the extra that we made up for the 1943 reunion, 65th reunion.

DONIN: Oh, great!

BOCK: I have all the bound volumes of my period and the loose issues. So I went through them from the beginning to the end. I read every paper. And it's been a fascinating experience, to see the evolution of *The Dartmouth*. You can see the change in the front page. We went to tabloid size after the war started. We used to have a full six-column newspaper. You can see what's on the front page in the different periods under the different editors. And see how the war—we were a member of the Associated Press. And we were the only daily newspaper in this vicinity. *The Claremont Eagle*, I think, used to come up every day, but it didn't have much more. So we had the AP wire, which we would receive down at the Dartmouth Printing Company over headphones and sit at this ancient typewriter. I mean the man would dictate the stories and then we would type them up and then put them in the paper that night. Get home usually about three a.m. which was called night editorship. But anyway, as I went through all these pages, I could see the war, in the '39-40 volume, the war is just a small occasional thing.

DONIN: Uh-huh. Below the fold.

BOCK: Gradually it starts to take more. What predominates in '39-40, under Tom Braden's editorship, that we would call the 1940 directorate, was Joe College—what I would now call Joe College kinds of things. Who was elected to Green Key and all that stuff and the football stories and the stories about fraternities and intramurals. Gradually, as you go from '39-40 into '40-41, that's Bob Harvey's, Charles Bolté—I hope you have a good deal on him.

DONIN: Yes.

BOCK: Because he was a real figure. You see it change. Cliff Stratton, the managing editor, was isolationist still. And that was the prevailing mood. Harvey and Bolté—Bolté particularly—started to move in the other direction. And then by the end of the '40-41 thing, I remember I was working on the commencement issue in May, I think. And I remember coming down from Hanover, and I think I got a ride with somebody; I don't know how I did that. But we were listening, hearing the stories of the Germans quickly going through northern France and taking close to Paris. So that when the academic year '40-41—I hope I get this right—'41-42, when that year started, of course, the war is now very heavily covered. And it's very much on

people's minds. So you have the period when *The Dartmouth* itself, the staff, was divided. That's in the Harvey regime. Braden was '39-40, Harvey is '40-41, and then you have Jerry Tallmer and Joe Palamountain in '41-42. And then us in—actually we became '42-43. You see in the Harvey period—Stratton was the managing editor. He had a great deal to do with the assignment of news stories.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

BOCK: Bolté was the feature editor, and he wrote columns and got things. And then by the end of that year, ended up on the side of intervention. And there was this big meeting—I'm sure a lot of people must have spoken about this—in 105 Dartmouth, where we had Bolté on the platform and Jack Brewster, I think, on one side. And Cliff Stratton, and I forget—oh, Jim Dinsmoor in my class. Nobody's mentioned the socialist, the sort of lone socialist who hung on to that position. And so Cliff Stratton and Jim Dinsmoor were isolationists, and Bolté and Jack Brewster interventionists. In the air, it was all anybody could think of. Mr. Hopkins had set up a defense committee—that's certainly going to be in if anybody's writing the intellectual history of that period—of faculty members called the Defense Preparedness Committee. I won't go into those details.

DONIN: I have to look that up.

BOCK: They were, if you just turn through the pages in the bound volumes, you'll see these things come up. You can see intellectual history being made. You can see Mr. Hopkins's influence. And Mr. Hopkins using, I thought, using his influence on campus with the faculty and using it also to some extent with the students. You'll see in this preparedness committee, he's got some leading student members. He's got Bill Remsen of my class who was also in C&G. And Mr. Hopkins had Bill Remsen, who was our class president in the freshman class and sophomore class, and maybe also in junior class, on this committee. And he, I think, gave audience to and encouraged folks who had this awareness. You'll see his commencement address—I mean his whatever it is when you start the….

DONIN: Convocation?

BOCK: Convocation address about spurious liberalism.

DONIN: Oh.

BOCK: Meaning these intellectuals like the Oxford Movement who are opposed to war and say it's all for the war profiteers and that kind of thing. And Boltė was very attuned to this and sort of picked it up. So you see the evolution of this in *The Dartmouth*, I think. I can't imagine a better way to see it. And of course in the Tallmer period, my predecessor, I'm going to take some of these things from that period and show them to him.

I never considered myself an intellectual while I was here, and I really—because I was primarily a newspaper editor, as I saw myself, and a political activist in a way. I certainly wasn't a sports person. And I never really was a full out all intellectual person. But with Sidney Cox and his seminars, and with *The Dartmouth*—I mean we were very hospitable to writers of any kind. I did get to know quite a lot of intellectual folks in my own class and some of them I think are not much appreciated. We were having the dinner last night and we raised the question, who is the least known member of our class; the person nobody ever hears of or recognizes the existence of? I had my own candidate, which I will say for the record also lived on the fourth floor of Streeter, names Amasa Pratt who came from Lowell I believe and his family made Pratts pews. He was always a bit wistful or wry about that. But he was just a very quiet person and went his way. One of the people around the table said Henry Inge and when we were headed in this direction, that's what triggered… Henry "Hank" Inge was… He lived mostly off campus after the first year. He came from Texas and he saw himself as a poet and as an aesthete. A lot of people who came in contact with him thought him odd because he wasn't sort of an all-rounder. He drank but he was relatively austere for a person of that age in a society of men.

DONIN: Didn't live up to the Dartmouth image of the…

BOCK: Of that time. Not the fraternity sort of person. And he had very high standards in his selection of poets and poetry and appreciation of aesthetics and art and so on. And there were a number of folks like that: Tom Littlefield of the class of '42, I think, '41 or '42, a poet who has ended up teaching at the State University of New York at Albany. I believe he may still be there. I haven't seen him in years. There were all a set of people; it shaded off into some folks who worked with the Players and if I had to pick the two least warlike

people in our class that I knew, one would have been Henry Inge and the other was a fellow who lived in Streeter named Donald Harty. And both were killed in the war. Henry Inge was in the Air Force so I guess got shot down. Don Harty joined the American Field Service to be an ambulance driver and I thought that was very appropriate for his sort of person. And he apparently go killed in Italy driving an ambulance. So it always struck me as being unjust in some way.

DONIN: Were there any conscientious objectors in your class, pacifists?

BOCK: I would say if we had one, Jim Dinsmoor would have been it. But the Dartmouth Christian Union—I don't know if you've come across those folks.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

BOCK: Larry Durgan, I believe. And actually the editor of our class newsletter came from a religious background. And he was Dartmouth Christian Union. Nobu Mitsui was a member of our class, and he was active in the Dartmouth Christian Union. So I would say that was a separate kind of intellectual coterie. One more I should mention—I can't get into depth in any of these things—is the printers, the typographers. At *The Dartmouth*, we were every night at the Dartmouth Printing Company, the ads were set and so on. The design of these things and then setting the type, getting the pieces of headlines and the leads and all that stuff. These folks worked for Ray Nash. I mean they cut their teeth on Ray Nash here in Baker, in the print shop down in the basement.

John Adams—a little bit more. John Adams became a major force for what you call "real politik." John Adams became a real force in the isolationist-interventionist controversy almost as soon as he came. He had a very deep voice, and he was—he liked to have a sort of stentorian doom tones. Very much in the—he spoke in the manner of a very influential historian of that period, Frederick L. Schuman, who used to write about current affairs in that same brooding what terrible things…. And so John—he was tall; he was very tall, and he had a crew cut. Big head and a rather full face. And he would stand in 105. He became a very popular lecturer. And his whole, his specialty, had been the Balkans. And so, you know, war and tribal things and all that. And assassinations. And he would start by showing you the geography. Where the Danube came down and the Varda River. And how the Crusaders had gone up

here and the Vandals and the Huns and so on, you know, up and down. And put it all in a kind of context. And this was all done in probably the first half hour of the course, but it really set the tone. We became quite good friends. I used to see him after the war a fair amount. He cut a figure because he had a very attractive wife, and they would have coffee or lunch or something in the Inn coffee shop. And the word quickly spread, at least in *The Dartmouth* it did, that he and his wife were talking in French. And we all said, they don't want anybody to know what they're talking about. [Laughs]

DONIN: Great.

BOCK: So he just became even a more romantic figure, you know.

DONIN: Oh, yes, yes.

BOCK: Young students are very quick to… They actually run off with that—I've had that experience myself—and exaggerate what there is to talk about.

After the war, I was in London from 1946 through 1952 as a graduate student and a Fulbright Fellow and other things, and I taught a little bit. And then I came back and worked for something called the Public Administration Clearinghouse, which was Ford essentially paid for it or supported by the Ford Foundation. And this particular unit of it—its main base was in Chicago; it had been part of the Good Government Public Administration movement in the 1930s, civil service reform. And President Roosevelt had drawn heavily on its membership connected with the University of Chicago. Rockefeller Foundation supported a lot of the…. And Roosevelt—and Ickes had come from Chicago. And when they needed to staff the New Deal with all these folks, they turned to the PACH, Public Administration Clearinghouse, among others. And so this unit that I worked for, it was set up to help the UN and also the then new, rather developing field, of development administration; that is, helping underdeveloped countries improve their…. It had another mission which was also to infuse the American point of view about how public administration should be carried out into continental Europe, where the Napoleonic concept, French bureaucracy and so on, had made a very inhospitable reception for anything of the American style of administration.

I became director of something called the Inter-University Case Program, which was a multi-university, 60 graduate schools

ultimately, had this research interest in writing case studies about how government is really carried out as opposed to what the textbooks say. It's sort of like the Harvard Business School in business using case studies. Only these were much more historical, lengthy and more political. When this organization moved from New York in 1963, the end of '63, to Syracuse, I became a professor of political science at the Maxwell School at Syracuse. And took the headquarters of this thing up there. But while I had been doing this in New York, which I did from 1954 to 1963, my title and work then was being the director of the Inter-University Case Program, 45 East 65th Street. I would go to India in these winter periods on behalf of the Appleby, Ford, Nehru effort to help them develop a better civil service. This is all along—I just have to make this quick background to tell you that on my way back…. The thing about going to India was, it's almost halfway around the world. And the Ford Foundation would pay for you to go any way you wanted as long as you got there and came back. On one of my trips back, I flew back from Delhi and ultimately got to Istanbul. I got on the train in Istanbul. And one reason I did it was because of John Adams. John Adams would say that this is the highway down through Belgrade and Niŝ and the valley and so on. And, oh, I remember one of the things. And he said, "And the Orient Express went down through here. I thought, well, I'm going to route myself back. And I took this terrible train. The Orient Express had decayed a great deal. Consisted of one passenger car, a dining car, ŝand a locomotive. I guess two passenger cars. The one passenger car was dropped at the border, the Greek frontier. You got through Bulgaria and Romania and so on. It was cold, in winter. And we didn't get much heat. But I got to Belgrade, and it was—I felt I was fulfilling my mission, so to speak, historically. I had to stop at the Institute of Public Administration in Belgrade for a lecture there. And then went on to Vienna. So John Adams was sort of living in my spirit.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

BOCK: As when I was at the LSE. One of the items I am reaching back to, another 43 years not mentioned here yet, and that is Jeremy Blanchet, I believe, who now is living in Oregon. Jerry Blanchet was a member of the ski team and when I was at the C&G House, I got to learn about Bob Meservey. Bob Meservey's father had been a teacher, a professor of physics and I think had an older brother who was on the ski team. And Bob Meservey was like T.E. Lawrence. Now I'm a member of the T.E. Lawrence Society and I

bought books of T.E. Lawrence and things. But I can see, he had that kind of impish desire to do things that… T.E. Lawrence climbed the tower at Oxford, you know, and left some kind of Arab flag flying from the top of it. Bob Meservey climbed Baker Tower and left something up there when he was… He was a very colorful figure. On this same ski team was Jerry Blanchet. Jerry was known in the class as a nice wonderful sort of person, retiring but not demeaning in any way. I mean he was a stalwart sort of person. And Jerry was a Rhodes Scholar. I got to know him when I was living in London as a graduate student. And I met him then and his then first wife Nancy Hoag. So we got to know him pretty well. And Jerry had been a graduate student at Harvard after the war and in 1947 was one of the people who went to the Salzburg Seminar in Max Reinhart's castle. It was called then the Harvard Seminar in American Studies and it was set up by Clemens Heller who was the son of a publisher in Vienna who published Freud's works in the pre-war period. […]

Another Dartmouth faculty member who was there then was Tom Vance who was a great figure. I mean great in intellectual standing. I'm not sure how much he was appreciated when he was here. He was a poet as well.

DONIN: I think the alumni magazine recently had an article about them.

BOCK: I'm glad to hear that. While I'm on that, there was another great teacher in English, not all that much appreciated these days named Joel Egerer. Joel Egerer had a crew cut, spare, unmarried, taught English 1A. George Munroe will certainly tell you about taking Joel Egerer's course.

DONIN: May I have a copy of that?

BOCK: Yes, you can have that.

DONIN: Oh, great.

BOCK: You'll see what we've put in this thing. An interview: "Teaching Dartmouth students is like teaching in a vacuum." That's a quotation in the headline, says Mr. Joel Egerer and explains why he thinks so. He was I think at one time a Salzburg person. Not the year I was there. Tom Vance was there then. Joel Egerer ended up in NYU as a bibliographer and a member of the Century Club as is George Munroe. So anyway…

DONIN: So this has been a very good… I'm just saying that this presents a very different side of Dartmouth that I'm glad that we have: the intellectual side.

BOCK: It is. I think it's worth… It's there, and you should perhaps—one might seek it out a bit more. And I think it would be quite rewarding.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Especially during those years when it's often been said that it was sort of an aging faculty that was here during the '40s. And that one of the tasks set for John Sloan Dickey was to enrich the faculty because so many of them were aging and sort of running out of steam, so to speak.

BOCK: Yes, yes, yes.

DONIN: Numbers of them themselves had to go to the war. Had to do their military service.

BOCK: Yes, sure. That's right. Joel Egerer left early. Joined the Marines.

DONIN: Yes, yes. So that there was some scrambling around after you all were gone.

BOCK: Yes.

DONIN: S o that later in the '40s there was some scrambling around to cover some of the courses here. And faculty were sort of stepping up to teach courses for which they really were not trained.

BOCK: Right, right. Yes.

DONIN: How did you feel about what the war and everyone's early departure? I assume you graduated in '42? They accelerated everybody. And you graduated in December of '42?

BOCK: Yes, December. Right. Mr. Sulzberger spoke. Bill Remsen and I spoke. And Mr. Hopkins.

DONIN: What did this do to the class's sort of sense of identity and unity? Your early departure and no official graduation ceremony. Some even leaving earlier than that.

BOCK: Yes, yes. Incidentally, the editor of *The Dartmouth* in '42, Jerry Talmer, left immediately after, the week after Pearl Harbor. In that same period, Rem Crego in my class, who was the center of our football team, went. And this editorial, this was published on that day. I mean this was part of that paper. This story has been pasted in from a different... But that was there, that was there, and most of this was there. And this editorial ran I think on that day, which is not far after the story about his death, recalling it… What it is is my recollection of journeying down on the train. I was going down just to go home early for the Christmas period. And I rode down with Rem Crego. And after the news of his death came, which was on this date, which was like—I can't tell without my glasses on.

DONIN: July 15, 1942.

BOCK: Then I wrote this edit. And on this recollection of what he was saying. It's quite interesting. Quite critical of faculty members who were staying and critical of what he called "intellectuals." He was a football person. Of intellectuals, faculty and students, who were talking about the cause of the war and so on, but weren't doing anything. Were not going. And it's touching. I mean he, as you see in the edit, which was partly a news story in a way, a recollection story, his conscience was, he wanted to go because we'd been attacked. We've got to fight back. But his conscience was saying, what will Mother and Dad think about this? Because they had sacrificed to get him into college.

DONIN: Right.

BOCK: And he says that… He told me that on the train. And he told me that his mother was ill and he didn't want to upset her because her health was precarious. But he did anyway. So it must have been quite devastating. I never found out what happened to his mother.

DONIN: Terrible.

BOCK: But that's part of it. Jerry Talmer went early, and Jerry Talmer came back early. That's the stuff I've been working on upstairs. Al Dickerson should not be underrated in this historical evolution. He used to keep close tabs on *The Dartmouth*. He was a great, great gentlemanly figure in the culture of the newspaper and his relationship to the college. So….

[End of Interview]