

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with George Day '49
By Mary Stelle Donin
August 4, 2009

[Editor's Note: Due to equipment failure, the bulk of George Day's telephone interview was lost during recording. We were able to rescue only a small portion of the interview. The audio picks up with George describing his return to campus for his senior year after a nine-year absence. Our profound apologies to Prof. Day.]

DAY: By the time I got there, there were signs saying, "For the Class of '59," "60," and so on. And one sign that said, "Go here for the class of 1949."

DONIN: Is that right?

DAY: Yes, that was I. [Laughs]

DONIN: Oh, isn't that sweet.

DAY: Yes, they counted me right along with the rest of them.

DONIN: So did you feel like an outsider here being so much older, married, with children and all that?

DAY: A little bit. But it was a great year. And we lived in Sachem Village of course. There were other slightly older and married people with kids. And so that formed quite a bond. And then even a few others in classes that became friends. And when they had the trials for the glee club, I thought, well, I can't do this. But just for fun I'm going to go in. So there's a little building back of New Hampshire Hall called Hallgarten or something.

DONIN: Yes, Hallgarten, yes.

DAY: And that's where they were. And Paul Zeller whom I had sung for, who was there, conducting his—what's that word? Not interviews.

DONIN: Tryouts [auditions]?

DAY: Tryouts, yes. There's another word, but tryouts. So I walked in, and it was my turn. [Laughs] He said, "George, you're back." And that

pleased me, of course, that he remembered me. And we had a little talk, and he said, "Well, you can sure try out. We probably have a slot in the club if you want it." But he said, "Aren't you going to be pretty busy?" I said, "Yes," and I realized the practical thing was to forget the glee club when I was back there.

DONIN: Right. So John Dickey, did he interact with you at all when you were back?

DAY: Yes, yes. And there's a great line or story there. Because when I got my diploma, I finally graduated after those nine years, I can't remember the setting, if we were interviewed together, or if he and I just socially talked about this or something. He said, "Well, you know, George, you're late graduation came" — I think he did it in the third person, you know— "George's graduation came late, nine years later, 13 years after he had matriculated. Not because he is slow, but because he is very thorough." [Laughter] Nice little twist to that.

DONIN: Very nice.

DAY: Yes.

DONIN: So by having to miss your senior year back in 1949, does that meant you missed the Great Issues course? Or were you able to do it?

DAY: No, it was still on in the fall of '57 when I came back.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

DAY: And that was a wonderful experience for us. We had everybody who was anybody speak to it. Oh, Henry Kissinger and Lewis Mumford and Robert Frost of course and just on and on. It was a great experience. And I learned a lot in it. I don't know...well, they don't have it anymore, do they? But it used to be that the requirement, the reading requirement, was the *New York Times* every day. Who can get through the whole *New York Times* every day? So a lot of us, you know, they had a Sunday issue called "The Week in Review."

DONIN: Right.

DAY: And we read that very, very carefully and thoroughly. And that sufficed for that course. [Laughs] But it was great. And the Tuesday morning sessions where you got to ask questions of the speaker the night before, those were very fruitful and fascinating.

DONIN: Right.

DAY: And so on.

DONIN: So just going back to your first three years there, how do you think the college did in this business of trying to mainstream this very diverse group of students that they had on campus at that point? I mean people like you who'd served, done their military service, and people much older than even you, who were coming back from their service, married with children. And then these sort of wet-behind-the-ears freshmen that were right out of high school someplace and had never been away from home. And they sort of threw everybody all in together, not just socially but in the classroom. How did that work?

DAY: Well, I don't think the college did anything overtly, consciously, to change that combination or mixture. Well, one was conscious of this gulf, so to speak, particularly because of the married students. I think Fayerweather had married students.

DONIN: Right. Yes.

DAY: It was kind of amazing to think that here are college guys who have wives, you know. And I don't know about it from their perspective, if they felt left out or anything. But I just don't know—I don't think there were, to my knowledge, there weren't things done to try to change the mixture there, the gulf that existed. Certainly there was, you know, I don't mean a gulf in speaking or being friends with. But when the guy sitting next to you was known, as this was the case, to have shot down seven Japanese zeroes, and another classmate had been a prisoner-of-war and had the heck beaten out of him in Yugoslavia, you know there's obviously—there's some common ground, but not a lot of common ground there.

DONIN: Yes, yes. And were they treated differently in the classroom, did you feel?

DAY: No, I don't think so.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

DAY: No, I didn't feel that at all. By the way, at my 60th reunion this June, I met a man who I sang in the glee club with all those years ago. And who's now in a wheelchair, but who's writing his memoirs. And I don't remember seeing him at other reunions. At any rate, we renewed our friendship, which was mainly out of the glee club. He was there at the reunion with his four sons.

DONIN: Oh....

DAY: And those four sons were right out of central casting. They were all tall. They were handsome. They were very kind and solicitous of their father to make sure he had a good time. He was in a wheelchair, and they had a van with a rig that could get him in and out. And that was just great, seeing Jack again. And he and I have developed a correspondence, and I'm helping him a little with his memoirs. He went in at Normandy on D-Day. And was later shot in the leg in France and Saint Lo. And he's wanting to write that up and has sent me what he's done so far. [...] See him again, and he's, of course, changed some in looks. But I easily placed him. And his sons made sure that he got in the alumni glee club thing at Spaulding. And there he was in his wheelchair but in the exact same spot that he was all those years ago. But he would be an example of this gulf more or less because he was married and living in Fayerweather and although I knew him in the glee club and liked him, you know, we didn't, of course, socialize much together. I don't recall his wife. One vet's wife sang with the glee club, sang some solos. Her husband wasn't in the glee club. And she was a very attractive woman with a beautiful voice. And Don Cobleigh enlisted her to sing a few numbers with us at our concerts which was kind of a first, I think, for Dartmouth.

DONIN: Well, they were actually using women in the community for, you know, all the plays and stuff as well.

DAY: Oh, sure.

DONIN: I mean lots of times obviously they actually had the men dressing up as women when they had no women. But I think whenever possible, they were using women from the community and of course when the wives came back with the veterans. I'm sure they were glad to see them as potential members.

DAY: Sure. Yes. Good supply there.

DONIN: Right.

DAY: The 50th reunion of the Class of '49, we were asked to write things in addition to the bare bones statistical stuff. And they accepted and printed my recollection, which recounts a lot of what I have told you here about how I was with the class for three years, and then I wasn't but I graduated. But my loyalty is still to that class. And, yes, I guess there's nothing to say here except Dartmouth is a big force in my life. I love it. And I think it's still a great school. One of the great courses I had at Dartmouth, by the way, was Russian civilization.

DONIN: Oh!

DAY: Taught by Dmitri von Mohrenschildt.

DONIN: Oh, yes. I remember—I've seen that name. Yes, yes.

DAY: He was of the nobility. And one of the really outstanding and great moments almost in my life was he brought to campus—and he spoke to us—Alexander Kerensky, who was the first premier or president of Russia in between the Revolution and the time the Bolsheviks kicked him out of office. And, you know, I think I've met a few important people but maybe Alexander Kerensky, historically, is one of the most important.

DONIN: Yes. Wow!

DAY: History would have been much different had he stayed in power. He was more humane, but a little hesitant in asserting his power. And of course that didn't work then. And I remember Professor von Mohrenschildt warned us—pleaded with us—in the question and answer session not to try to get into why he lost power.

[End of Interview]