

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Thomas J. Swartz '49
By Mary Stelle Donin
October 2, 2009

DONIN: How is it that you ended up coming to Dartmouth? Were you a legacy?

SWARTZ: Well, I was not a legacy. I had heard, you know, over a period of time from some very wonderful alumni, who talked so much about Dartmouth, I was very intrigued.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: And it was during the war, especially, I figured hopefully it would make a good school and backed up with Bucknell, and got admitted and Bucknell never even got a chance to say hello. I was lucky, especially because the number one class—fellow in my class--was John Stearns who was also a classmate.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: So the teachers all said, well, you know, Stearns is always going to make it. He's number one. I hope you'll make. And of course I worked awfully hard for that, and happily I did make it.

DONIN: Had you come up to see the school before?

SWARTZ: Never.

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: Never saw the place. In fact the first time I ever saw Dartmouth was when my father put me on the train at Grand Central Station to go to White River Junction.

DONIN: My gosh!

SWARTZ: The middle of the summer, it was hot. They didn't even have air-conditioning. They had ice underneath the car that blew with a fan, blew. And the ice gave out about halfway there.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: And it was like a hotbox.

DONIN: So you were— Now your class arrived here in sort of different stages.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: The forty-nine '49ers who came in the spring and then—were you the July group?

SWARTZ: I was the middle one. I was the July. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: Two weeks after high school.

DONIN: You graduated and came right up here.

SWARTZ: Right up.

DONIN: And where did you—What was your dorm? What dorm were you in?

SWARTZ: I was in Wheeler, 108 Wheeler.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: And were the roommates good?

SWARTZ: Well, I had a wonderful roommate. I went to see him—happily I got to meet the guy before he even got here. Went to Portland, Maine, to meet Kinsley Ball who was my roommate. He's a swell guy. And his mother made a big lobster dinner for us.

DONIN: Oh!

SWARTZ: So he went to Kimball Union.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: And we just got along great. I took the second deck on the two-decker bed because I didn't want people messing around sitting on my bed all the time. And I figured nobody gets upstairs, though, so I was okay.

DONIN: [Laughs] So your dormitory at that point, let's see, were there still military, was there still military training going on?

SWARTZ: Oh, my, yes.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Were they in your dorm or not?

SWARTZ: I don't think they were in by dorms. I think they were kind of by themselves.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: But they had a parade every, I think it was, Wednesday. It was a naval parade.

DONIN: Mm-hmm

SWARTZ: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: On The Green.

SWARTZ: And the marines, yes.

DONIN: Yes. Were they still doing reveille in the morning and all that, marching around?

SWARTZ: There wasn't a lot of that. But the parade was the big thing every Wednesday.

DONIN: Mmm.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: Did you have them in your classes?

SWARTZ: I don't think so. I don't recall having classes with the military fellows.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you must have been here right when John Dickey was beginning his presidency.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes.

DONIN: In November of that year.

SWARTZ: That's right. In fact when I first came here, his predecessor was still president.

DONIN: Ernest Martin Hopkins.

SWARTZ: Ernest Martin Hopkins was the president, and Dickey only took over I believe in November.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: Yes. That's right.

DONIN: So did you have a matriculation ceremony with Hopkins or with Dickey? You know, where he signed your—

SWARTZ: Hopkins—yes, Hopkins signed my matriculation paper.

DONIN: Oh, so you were the last group that he signed them for.

SWARTZ: Yes, the last ones, that's right.

DONIN: Ah, that must have been an emotional time for him.

SWARTZ: Yes, it was.

DONIN: Mmm.

SWARTZ: He was a very fine gentleman. I liked him very much.

DONIN: And that means when you got here, you were on campus for VJ-Day.

SWARTZ: Oh, yes. Oh, my, we'll never forget that! It was August.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: We were playing a baseball game. Wheeler was playing in the championship for the softball—no, hardball I guess it was—championship with some other team. And about the middle of the game, whistles blew and lights flickered and everything went crazy. We didn't know what was going on. Lo and behold, it was VJ night.

DONIN: How did you find out about it? Did people come running down to tell you?

SWARTZ: Oh, yes. They were all running all over the place.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: And so we had to stop the game. We were lucky because we were behind. [Laughter] So we had a chance to replay the game later.

DONIN: That's great.

SWARTZ: But it was fun. Yes.

DONIN: What a happy time.

SWARTZ: It was a marvelous time. And gosh, we were just kids, just kids right out of high school.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: With all these fellows that were, lots of them were much older than we were.

DONIN: Grown men.

SWARTZ: We were 18, and they were as much as 26 or 27 years old some of them.

DONIN: Well, there was a huge age range of the students on campus at that point.

SWARTZ: That's right.

DONIN: And '46, when so many of them came pouring back.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes.

DONIN: To resume their education.

SWARTZ: That's right.

DONIN: Was it intimidating for you being a freshman, so young?

SWARTZ: Well, they were pretty nice to us. But, you know, they were—These guys were seasoned veterans, and they'd tell some stories you kind of couldn't believe. I mean these war stories were something.

DONIN: I bet.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: And did they ask you—I mean did you get treated like a freshman and have to carry furniture and wear a beanie and all that?

SWARTZ: No. You know what? They thought that was childish.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: The veterans and all thought that was kind of small stuff. They didn't go for that too much. Lucky for us. We didn't have to do too much of it—a little bit of it, but not very much at all.

DONIN: You escaped that.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes. I'd say so.

DONIN: Well, I've heard about this term that was used for, I think the group that was staying—that was living in Topliff. Something called '49 Out.

SWARTZ: 'Forty-nine Out.

DONIN: Where they'd make you get out of your bed and run downstairs and....

SWARTZ: [Laughs] Yes, '49 Out. Yes. You know, there was some of that, as I say. Not much, but there was some of that kind of thing. And we wore our beanies and all that stuff, you know.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: We did some of that, yes. But it was far worse in other times I'm sure.

DONIN: Yes, yes. I mean there were even married veterans living here.

SWARTZ: Oh, my, yes. Oh, yes, indeed.

DONIN: In Fayerweather and Sachem and Wigwam.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes. There were a lot of veterans.

DONIN: Uh-huh. But did you sort of—Did you feel like you were sort of removed from them? I mean, you didn't interact with them that much.

SWARTZ: Not too much, no. They were kind of by themselves. And yes. And we clung together, the civilians. [Laughs]

DONIN: And the youngsters. I mean you were so young.

SWARTZ: Yes, we were youngsters. You look at the yearbook. And we were just saying today, that green book, you know, about freshmen. My we were young-looking.

DONIN: So young.

SWARTZ: We were just kids.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: We really were.

DONIN: Very young. And in the classroom, you said you didn't have many of them in your classes.

SWARTZ: No, there wasn't too much of that. There was a little sprinkle around here and there, but not too much.

DONIN: So how did you adjust to college learning?

SWARTZ: Well, I came from a very fine high school. Probably one of the better high schools in the metropolitan New York area.

DONIN: What was it called?

SWARTZ: Columbia High School. Maplewood and South Orange, New Jersey. And, you know, we worked hard, and it paid off because when we got to college, we weren't in a big shock. We just kind of continued and kept going. We had an incentive to do well. Let's just really do well and see how far we can go. And I started out very well.

DONIN: So you were well prepared.

SWARTZ: Yes, I'd say so.

DONIN: You weren't one of those that had sort of a wakeup call after the first term, I assume.

SWARTZ: I mean we worked hard, but we didn't just, you know, burn the midnight oil in the library til....

DONIN: Uh huh.

SWARTZ: There wasn't too much of that. Yes.

DONIN: So what was your major?

SWARTZ: Well, I started out with, I don't know, 3.4, 2.8, and a 3.2, which is, you know, B+ or pretty good.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: And then I was in a fraternity. The fraternities had just opened up.

DONIN: That's right. The fraternities were just reopening.

SWARTZ: Yes. They'd just reopened. And mine was Chi Phi. And then, you know, I didn't go crazy. But I did slide a little bit, you know. But still, you know, it was all right. I didn't do that badly. So I was never in any jeopardy.

DONIN: Did you have a particular teacher that you really enjoyed?

SWARTZ: Oh, they were all very fine teachers. But one of the—The man who was the advisor to my fraternity, who was a fellow named Al Frye. Al Frye was a professor at Tuck School.

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: When I subsequently went to Tuck School, of course, I had him. I knew him, you know, right through school, and a very fine man. And of course there were a lot of other fine guys, too.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: But he always stuck out. Yes.

DONIN: Was he someone that you could go to for more than just advice about classes?

SWARTZ: Yes. I mean I'd get to where I had dinner with him and so on. I got to know him quite well. And I think if there were any questions that something that really was a real problem, I would go to somebody like that.

DONIN: So you didn't go to the dean's office for advice.

SWARTZ: Oh, no, I stayed out of that. I never got involved with the dean, you know, warnings, and all that stuff. No. I didn't get into any of that stuff.

DONIN: Well, from the stories I've heard, one did not want to have to go see Dean Neidlinger in those days.

SWARTZ: No, no. Neidlinger was kind of a tough guy.

DONIN: Yes? [Laughs]

SWARTZ: He came from our area. He was a football player.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: He didn't mince words. He was very strict. But probably he needed to in a situation like that.

DONIN: Sure. Right.

- SWARTZ: But I never dealt with him at all.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- SWARTZ: No.
- DONIN: And did you— What was the fraternity you joined?
- SWARTZ: Chi Phi. That's the Herot now.
- DONIN: Oh, yes. Right. Chi Herot.
- SWARTZ: Chi Herot.
- DONIN: Uh-huh. And there was rushing and all that?
- SWARTZ: Oh, yes.
- DONIN: That came probably, what, in your sophomore year, your freshman year?
- SWARTZ: Yes. Mm-hmm. It was the spring of my sophomore year, first term. And that's when we pledged. A whole gang of us went together and decided, we asked each other, what do you think of the place? One guy says, "Well, I don't know. What do you think?" One fellow says, "I like the pool table in here." So we said, "That's it, if you like the pool table, we'll do it." [Laughter] I mean, it was kind of ridiculous. At any rate, we did like the place.
- DONIN: That's great.
- SWARTZ: I subsequently was secretary and president.
- DONIN: Oh, wow!
- SWARTZ: Oh, yes. I've been very involved with the fraternity. The fraternity system has a lot of good qualities; a lot of people will belittle the fraternities. But they do a good job today especially, you know, as far bringing people contemporary and right up to the minute of what's needed in the world of today. And yes.
- DONIN: Was that your main social life, at the fraternity?
- SWARTZ: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: Mm-hmm. Yes.

DONIN: And did you participate in other college activities that—

SWARTZ: Well, I did some things, yes. I mean, I tried out for baseball. I was in glee club for a while.

DONIN: Oh!

SWARTZ: And they told me that they had an overabundance of second tenors and to come back at the end of the season. That was a way of saying, get lost, you know. [Laughs]

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: And I never did come back. You know, things like that.

DONIN: Yes. How about all the outdoor activities that the college offered? Did you participate in the Outing Club?

SWARTZ: Well, I was never a great golfer—I mean, a skier.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: But I did ski here. And I played golf. I love golf.

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: I think the first week I was here I was playing golf.

DONIN: Oh, that's great.

SWARTZ: Yes. I love golf.

DONIN: Mountain climbing?

SWARTZ: No, I don't do any of that. No.

DONIN: Did they do an outing, a freshman outing trip for you guys when you got here?

SWARTZ: Yes. Not as extensively as—

DONIN: Over on Moosilauke and all that?

SWARTZ: They did a little one-day thing kind of out to Occom Pond.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

SWARTZ: And that kind of thing. And that was about it.

DONIN: Well, that's the best they could do just then.

SWARTZ: Sure, sure. That's right.

DONIN: So did all—once VJ-Day happened and they resumed a normal school schedule and such, did all the sort of traditions of the college get reinstated?

SWARTZ: I think pretty much, yes.

DONIN: You had Homecoming in the fall.

SWARTZ: Yes, we had all that.

DONIN: I don't think they called it Homecoming.

SWARTZ: No.

DONIN: They called it—

SWARTZ: Just Fall Weekend, I think.

DONIN: Fall Weekend. Uh-huh. Winter Carnival?

SWARTZ: Yes, Winter Carnival and all that. I was interrupted in my—in 1946, I was, they were still having a draft. So a lot of us in the class decided to go, to join up.

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: Which I did. And so I was in the Army. Luckily I was only in the Armed Forces after the war.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: I was in the Army for just a little over a year. And got back in Dartmouth after just missing one year.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

SWARTZ: Which was wonderful. The timing was perfect.

DONIN: So lucky.

SWARTZ: Yes. A lot of us were very fortunate that way. And of course we had the GI Bill.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

SWARTZ: Marvelous.

DONIN: Terrific.

SWARTZ: I think it practically paid for our whole college that way.

DONIN: Yes. So were you here just one year or two years and then—oh, I see, you must have been here two years—a year and a half?

SWARTZ: Yes. And then grabbed me in the fall of '46, and I was here 'til the entry of the next class which was in the fall of '47.

DONIN: And did that mean you missed graduation with your own class? Or were you able to catch up?

SWARTZ: Well, yes. I went to Tuck School; I got another year there.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: So I didn't actually get out until '51.

DONIN: So was this the time when Tuck was doing—you went three years undergrad and then two at Tuck

SWARTZ: Three and two. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

- SWARTZ: That was very common, three years and two at Tuck which was good. It worked out very well.
- DONIN: So you finished in '51?
- SWARTZ: Yes.
- DONIN: Did that— There was a lot of that going on, where, you know, the graduation classes were all mixed up.
- SWARTZ: Yes, oh, yes.
- DONIN: You weren't necessarily graduating with your class.
- SWARTZ: Oh, my, there was so much of that.
- DONIN: Yes.
- SWARTZ: Yes. That's right.
- DONIN: Did that impact your feeling of solidarity with your class?
- SWARTZ: Not really because our classes were quite close together. They don't go off to foreign countries to study abroad in those days the way they do today. So there was not that much of an alienation or fracture. Pretty much we were all together. Might come and go for six months or something. But basically the classes stayed together.
- DONIN: So you kept your identity with your own class.
- SWARTZ: Oh, yes, very much. Very much. And that's why we're so strong about the class of '49.
- DONIN: Right, right. It's a wonderful class.
- SWARTZ: Well, it is a nice class.
- DONIN: Now, how do you think the college did during those years when there were you sort of youngsters who were at that point civilians and very young, right out of high school, all mixed up with all these, you know, 26-, 27-year-old grown men who'd already had terrible war experiences and were clearly looking for a different kind of social life than what you guys were looking for? How did the college

do offering activities for such a wide, you know, and diverse group, both age-wise and experience-wise?

SWARTZ: Well, that's a good point. I don't know. We seemed to have enough to do to keep us busy. We had some of these fellows in our fraternity, much older guys. But they mellowed out after a little while. Some of them grew very contentious, you know. But others were fairly quiet. A lot of them got married and lived on campus, you know.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: And they drifted off, you know. It all worked out well.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: So everybody sort of managed to get along and get focused on their work more than anything else.

SWARTZ: I think so.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: I'd say so, yes. And of course these fellows who were married especially wanted to get out of here and make a living for their family.

DONIN: Yes. They were definitely in a hurry.

SWARTZ: A lot of us weren't married, of course.

DONIN: Right.

SWARTZ: So we weren't quite as opportunistic, shall we say. We didn't jump at the issues of trying to get out of there and make a dollar.

DONIN: Right.

SWARTZ: We did that after we got out of school.

DONIN: Sure. Did you feel different as a student when you came back after your one year in the military? Were you a better student or were you more mature? Did it change you at all as a student?

SWARTZ: I didn't.... I worked in the separation center, and we were discharging the guys who were really the war heroes. They came back on these boats and we had to get them out of there. And we were typing discharges and stuff. There was a lot of people on the financial end of it, too. And our class, quite a few Dartmouth guys were down there with me at Camp Dix in New Jersey and Camp Kilmer where they had the separation. So some of us, as I say, we were very wise to get our work done, and then that was it. And we found after a little over a year they were trying to get people out of there. They were trying to break down the military.

DONIN: Mmm. Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: And we were lucky to take advantage of that and say, well, they don't need us anymore. They called that the National Health, Safety and Interest—health, safety, and interest of getting these guys out of the service and back into—

DONIN: Normal life.

SWARTZ: Normal life, yes.

DONIN: Good timing for you.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: Good timing.

SWARTZ: Oh, it was, yes. Very good.

DONIN: Now when you got back, did you have to work a part-time job?

SWARTZ: Well, no, because we had the GI Bill. And gee, we didn't—We were doing all right.

DONIN: That's terrific.

SWARTZ: I mean, we didn't make a lot of money but we were floating along.

DONIN: Sure. Yes.

SWARTZ: Yes, it really was good.

DONIN: Yes, yes.

SWARTZ: We worked summers when we got home and so on. But you know....

DONIN: Did you have any interaction with John Sloan Dickey at all, personally yourself?

SWARTZ: No, not personally. But we certainly admired the man. He was a very bright man, and he did well for the college. We now read all these things...all those quotes come back, and it's so relevant today.

DONIN: It's amazing, isn't it?

SWARTZ: Yes, it is.

DONIN: And I say this often in these interviews, there are very few speeches that are given here at Dartmouth that don't quote John Sloan Dickey.

SWARTZ: I know. I know.

DONIN: It's amazing.

SWARTZ: One thing he said was, "Gentlemen, your business here is learning."

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: And that's something that stuck with all of us.

DONIN: It's great.

SWARTZ: What are we doing here? We've got to study.

DONIN: Yes. And how about—the other quote I love is: "The world's troubles are our troubles." Or something like that.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes. Well....

DONIN: I mean he was just an amazing guy.

SWARTZ: That's exactly right. Your new president thinks that. He believes in it.

DONIN: Did you get to take the Great Issues course?

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: Did you enjoy it?

SWARTZ: Loved it.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: Great! I know they're talking about bringing it back. I think it's a great idea.

DONIN: It had a real impact on those generations that got to take it.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes. Oh, I think that's very important to being brought up to speed as to what's happening in the world.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: You can be in a cocoon up here.

DONIN: It's easy to hide away up here.

SWARTZ: [Laughs] It is. It really is. Yes.

DONIN: It's that kind of a place. So you actually—your graduation ceremony, you graduated with the class of '51?

SWARTZ: Well....

DONIN: But there was a big mixture of classes at that point.

SWARTZ: Yes. Fifty-one, I was getting my master's degree at Tuck.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

SWARTZ: I got my degree there.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

SWARTZ: I got an undergraduate degree but I think it was in '50, a year late.

DONIN: Oh, I see.

SWARTZ: But whatever, I got everything right.

DONIN: So you had two graduation ceremonies that you participated in.

SWARTZ: Yes, yes.

DONIN: But there must have been a lot of people like you doing that.

SWARTZ: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. So a year doesn't mean a thing at that point.

DONIN: Right.

SWARTZ: People were coming at it different hours and different times.

DONIN: Right.

SWARTZ: Yes.

DONIN: Somebody quoted during one of these interviews that at their graduation there were like 15 classes represented starting from about 1937 right up to—

SWARTZ: Well, that was in that article. I read that.

DONIN: Oh, maybe that's where— Yes.

SWARTZ: In the *Times*, in a 1949 article.

DONIN: Fifteen different classes.

SWARTZ: I saw that.

DONIN: Well, it really describes, you know, what was going on here.

SWARTZ: It did, it did.

DONIN: You know that they were pushing a lot of students out of here from different classes.

SWARTZ: That's right.

DONIN: Getting them finished up.

SWARTZ: Yes. I graduated. I went into the family business. We manufactured children's clothing.

DONIN: Oh.

SWARTZ: And our plant was in Georgia. And I was in the selling end of it primarily. But I wound up to run it and so on. But then after a while, that whole industry went to the Far East, and we had to just get out of it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

SWARTZ: But I always got very active also in the Dartmouth alumni.

DONIN: Oh, great!

SWARTZ: And active in the local club.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: And in fact right now, as I say, I'm leaving to do scholarship work.

DONIN: Great.

SWARTZ: We're interviewing five scholarship people. So, you know, we keep going.

DONIN: It's wonderful. Wonderful.

SWARTZ: And I got an award. I got the Dartmouth Alumni Award.

DONIN: Oh!

SWARTZ: It was as a result of—I always said little drops of water. And they add up, you know.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: Not anything major. But constantly there, with little things happening.

DONIN: Yes.

SWARTZ: That's been going on ever since I got out of here.

[End of Interview]