

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Louis Wiederhold '45
By Mary Stelle Donin
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WIEDERHOLD: My father stopped his education in the eighth grade because he had to go to work, and so he never either finished high school or went to college, and so he felt very strongly that I should go to college. When we came to choosing colleges, we had spent summer vacations in New England, so we came around and visited Hanover when I was still at Penn Charter. And we liked the campus, and so—and he also had a very—having grown up in Philadelphia, the majority of college entrances from there were either to Princeton or Penn. Harvard, too. And he wanted me to avoid names, i.e., if you're going to do something, do it on your own, not because of where you went to school. So, we kind of decided, well, I'll apply to Dartmouth. And I did. It was the only place I applied to and I got accepted.

DONIN: What appealed to you about it when you first went there, just when you were still looking at colleges?

WIEDERHOLD: Well, I had spent summers working on a farm in Maine; I was a camp counselor in Vermont, and, you know, I had spent time—I had grown up in the suburbs and I really didn't want to live in the suburbs; I wanted to live in the county. And so that kind of pushed me into northern New England.

DONIN: When you got there were you able to participate in some of the outdoor stuff that was available? You know, the Outing Club and that kind of thing.

WIEDERHOLD: Well, you know, I matriculated in September of '41, and the war started several months after that and it put kind of a damper on anything that went on because there were no cars; there was no gas and whatnot, and, you know, extracurricular activities were downplayed, I guess, just because of the atmosphere. I did play sports. I won my numerals in freshman soccer and freshman track, and I played varsity soccer in my sophomore year and got my D in that, but I had to quit in the

following year because all the games were away and I couldn't afford to lose the time from school.

DONIN: Traveling was by bus, right?

WIEDERHOLD: Yes, by bus, or by thumb. I mean, if we went anywhere, we had to either—you know, some of us went by train, but, you know, most of us—I used to go to Boston or Northampton by my thumb.

DONIN: And you were hitchhiking to the other girls' colleges?

WIEDERHOLD: Yeah, which was rare. You know, I didn't do it very often, but, I mean this was the only way we got anywhere. And, you know, drivers would pick us up and whatnot. It was a very open atmosphere in those days.

DONIN: So, what do you remember about the matriculation ceremony? Was this an opportunity to shake hands with President Hopkins?

WIEDERHOLD: Yes. That was a very moving experience, because we had 723, I think, in our class and we met in the old field house, and all the students sat on the floor, and President Hopkins very informally, without a tie, walked around amongst the students, just expounding spontaneously to these new matriculates. And he said three things, which I recall as if it were yesterday. He said, "Remember how your loyalties go. First to your college, second to your class, and third to your fraternity." And the other thing that he said, he said, "We're not going to teach you a lot of facts and figures, but Dartmouth is going to teach you how to think." And I sat there and I thought: How the hell are they going to teach me to think? But, it did, and it was something that I treasured, you know, and tried to teach my students ever since. And what a wonderful personality he was. You know, just so down to earth. You know, you could speak to him on the street and whatnot. He knew you were a Dartmouth student.

DONIN: Now, I've heard stories about the whole sort of treatment of the freshmen, how you had to wear a beanie—

WIEDERHOLD: Yeah, we did. We had to wear beanies.

- DONIN: And do sort of scut work for the upperclassmen.
- WIEDERHOLD: That's right. For the sophomores. Yeah, that's right.
- DONIN: And I assume you got tortured like the rest of them.
- WIEDERHOLD: Well, yeah, but it was pretty mild. You know, it was not very—not a lot of hazing and that sort of stuff.
- DONIN: Right. And there was some contest where you ran across the green, run the gamut between the—
- WIEDERHOLD: Yeah, I can't recall that. There was that and there was tugs of rope and stuff like that with the '44s and whatnot. It was all good fun.
- DONIN: So, that first term before December, obviously, was a happy time. It was traditional undergraduate college life.
- WIEDERHOLD: Supposedly, yeah.
- DONIN: Such as it was.
- WIEDERHOLD: You know, we were all very green and wondering, you know, where are we? What are we doing here? How are we gonna—and I guess the biggest jump was going from a prep school, where I went to school, you know, to an open college. You know, it was an entirely different kind of teaching and responsibility and classes. You know, we had five courses, an hour apiece, and three of those courses met Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and two of them met Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.
- DONIN: Oh yeah, you had Saturday classes.
- WIEDERHOLD: Saturday classes for an hour. And for each hour you spent in class, you were supposed to spend two hours in preparation. So, you know, that took up—but that was entirely different from anything that I had, you know, education-wise prior to that. So, you know, there was a lot of adjustment to this, you know. Getting used to a different style of teaching and, you know, being away from home. Emotional and stuff like this that went along with it. You know, what was a regular college

at that time? I don't know. I had never been anywhere else before.

DONIN: Right. And there wasn't a lot of sort of support for you there. I mean, it wasn't like there were the housemasters and deans.

WIEDERHOLD: That's right. Well, yes there were, because, you know, we were all in dormitories at that time, and, you know, we formed acquaintances and cadre on our hall, so to speak. And I mean there were, you know, upperclassmen as well as freshmen on the same hall, so that you got—you were taken into this group and whatnot. And Parkhurst Hall was always open to anybody if you had to go see the dean or the bursar. You could go in there and rap on the door and sit awhile and either the secretary or the boss would come out and have about ten minutes with you. It was all done. You know, if you needed help, it was there. There was a chaplain or whatever on campus and whatnot, too.

DONIN: So what dormitory were you in that first year? Do you remember?

WIEDERHOLD: Smith.

DONIN: Right. Smith, Ripley and what was the third?

WIEDERHOLD: Woodward. And after our freshman year we got booted out because the Navy came.

DONIN: Yeah, and took it over.

WIEDERHOLD: Took it over.

DONIN: Yep. So, do you remember December 7th? Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

WIEDERHOLD: Absolutely.

DONIN: Were you there on campus. It was a Sunday, so...

WIEDERHOLD: I was studying up in Baker Library when—

DONIN: Oh, yeah. A lot of people have said that.

- WIEDERHOLD: During the Sunday afternoon, and some student came down and announced that, you know, Pearl Harbor had been bombed.
- DONIN: Did Hopkins then call the campus together, you know, to have sort of a conversation with everybody? Do you remember?
- WIEDERHOLD: I don't remember and I don't think so. You know, that was a Sunday and the board of trustees met sometime, I think, in the next week. And immediately shut down all vacations and closed everything off. And then we began to get some, you know, information as to what was going to go on, but at the time of Pearl Harbor, there was not any meeting, so to speak, at that time, because I think it was all pretty nebulous. You know, that we weren't nearly—you know, we just didn't realize what was going on at that stage of the game.
- DONIN: Yeah. And it was after that that they changed the schedule so that school was running year-round, right?
- WIEDERHOLD: Right then and there.
- DONIN: Yeah. So you knew that you weren't going to be having summer vacations and such.
- WIEDERHOLD: Absolutely. We went right on through. We'd get through a semester, write our final exams, the professors would have a week to read the exams and we'd start right in again.
- DONIN: Now, did you see a lot of the upperclassmen going off to enlist right away?
- WIEDERHOLD: Oh, absolutely.
- DONIN: Yeah. So, the campus must have sort of emptied out.
- WIEDERHOLD: It did.
- DONIN: And not just upperclassmen; I assume some of the faculty as well.
- WIEDERHOLD: It was a whole different atmosphere, you know, during that next year.

- DONIN: Right. Did the fraternities keep going at that point?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yes.
- DONIN: They did?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yeah, on a reduced—as a matter of fact, you know, they did increase their housing because the dormitories had shut down. So, I mean, we still were in—there were still beds available in the fraternities for some students.
- DONIN: Did you rush a particular fraternity?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yes.
- DONIN: Was that a good experience for you?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yes. You know, I was a DTD: Delta Tau Delta.
- DONIN: And do you feel like you followed President Hopkins' recommendations that you—you know, your first loyalty was—
- WIEDERHOLD: Oh, I think no question about it.
- DONIN: Yeah. So, tell us what your education schedule was like. I mean, you were in this compressed—you were now in this compressed system, right?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yes.
- DONIN: So that you finished up in a much shorter time period.
- WIEDERHOLD: Yes. No, I finished my requirements in—
- DONIN: Hello! We have company.
- WIEDERHOLD: In February of 1944, so it was only two and a half years that I got all my hours. As a matter of fact, I took 128 hours to graduate and I had 142.
- DONIN: Oh, more than you needed.

WIEDERHOLD: Well, it was because of, you know, because of my chemistry major and, you know, the lab hours that I put in. Because we got four hours for chemistry courses.

DONIN: Yeah. So, did you know when you started, when you went to Dartmouth, that you wanted to be a doctor at that point?

WIEDERHOLD: Well, that's a good question because I did. I wanted—I started out in the premed course and I followed that for my first four semesters. I became disenchanted with the premed advisor. It was a fellow named Rolf Syvertsen.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

WIEDERHOLD: And he was very dogmatic in where he wanted the premed students to go and all the courses that he wanted them to take, which, I might say, some of them were entirely unnecessary, as far as medical school preparation, which I learned later on. But, he was very difficult to relate to. He was really not student-oriented at all. I mean, he was a hard-headed administrator. And so, along about the end of my sophomore year I became disenchanted with his advice and I then had some experience with the chemistry department, so I switched my major into chemistry, and was very happy with them. During the last two years, we had, in our class, ten civilian chemistry majors.

DONIN: That's it?

WIEDERHOLD: That's it. In our class. And from those ten students, we had three fulltime old professors who were our mentors. And those guys knew everything about each one of us, and, you know, taught us what we needed to know. And it just was a father-son relationship with these senior faculty members.

DONIN: How lucky to have between the ten of you to have three profs.

WIEDERHOLD: Absolutely.

DONIN: Dedicated to the ten of you.

WIEDERHOLD: That's right. You know, we just went from one to the other and so forth, depending on what course we were taking at the time. It was an absolutely fantastic experience, you know.

DONIN: At that point in the '40s—I should know this and I've forgotten—was the medical school—it was a two-year program?

WIEDERHOLD: Yes.

DONIN: That then fed you into other schools to finish up, right?

WIEDERHOLD: Yes. And see, this is what Syvertsen wanted to do. The stopgap was organic chemistry in the third year and the number of seats in that class was 100, 110—something like this. And Syvertsen wanted to fill that class with premed students—out of the 700, he wanted that class full. And then what he did was to pick the 25 top guys to go to Dartmouth. And then the other 75 had to go somewhere else. And some of the fellows that went into that organic class never should have gone in, because they weren't fit to go, and he never stopped anybody from going. And, you know, you go in your third year, you flunk organic chemistry, and then you didn't have a major to pursue it, and this is what I criticized Syvertsen about, you see, because he did not use judgment as far as what students were appropriate for a pre-medical course.

And I had a roommate who—as a matter of fact, I had several students who were premed students—one of them in particular, and this fellow was a good student—not an excellent one, but a good student, and he had—his peripheral interests were art and music and history, and so for his electives he wanted to take art and music and history. And he'd go up to Sy, and Sy would say, "No. You've got to take advanced physical chemistry and embryology," and so on and so forth. And Mac would come back to the room with his ulcer literally burning after this. And I thought: I don't want to do this. And this fellow has ended up—I might add—as a dean at Cornell Medical School, so, I mean, you know, he's done exceptionally well, but he got treated terribly as a student by Sy, in comparison to how we were treated as chem majors with what we were fortunate to have. And at the end of it, when we were finished our course, every one of those students either had a spot in graduate school, or in industry to go to work, or someplace to go. He was not just sent out to, you know, find his own.

DONIN: And that's because of the three profs.

WIEDERHOLD: That's right. They sent me to the University of Illinois, and some of them went to medical school and so forth, but I mean everybody that finished a course—graduated, I guess I should use the word—they all had a spot to go to after getting their degree.

DONIN: Was it your goal—When you graduated from Dartmouth, was it your goal to get a PhD or to go to medical school?

WIEDERHOLD: No, my goal at that time was to get a PhD. Elden Hartshorn sent me out to University of Illinois to one of his buddies who ran the organic chemistry department out there, and I went out and worked there and went to school until I was drafted. And that was a wonderful experience, too. I mean, it was a great atmosphere, as far as chemistry was concerned. Great bunch of guys. The man who was the boss of that—a fellow named Steve Marble – we were working on making a synthetic rubber and was in the very beginning of making plastics. And all of the fellows in the lab were trying to make different kinds of polymers or plastics and whatnot, and they'd either end up with juice or else it would get stuck in the flask and we couldn't get it out. And one afternoon, Steve Marble got all of the graduate students all together—this was in 1944—and he got up in front of us and said, "Plastics is going to revolutionize the packaging industry." And I said to myself, I said, "What the hell is he talking about?" Had no clue. You know, he was so far ahead of the time, so to speak. Of course, now we don't know what to do with these plastics, you know, but it—you know, the leadership and the insight that he had and the stimulus that he had to his students was, you know, just top drawer.

DONIN: So let's back up a little bit. You were on campus when Dartmouth sort of turned—Hopkins—turned itself over to the navy department and the military to become sort of a military training school.

WIEDERHOLD: Yes.

DONIN: How did that impact your experience there?

WIEDERHOLD: We did a lot of walking and a lot of bike riding, I guess that's really what—because we all had to live off-campus. I rode a bike, you know, from half a mile into class and so forth. It didn't affect our teaching, but it did affect, you know, they just took over the whole—

DONIN: The day-to-day living.

WIEDERHOLD: The day-to-day living. You know, they'd get out and march on Wheelock Street at six o'clock in the morning, and, you know, waiting until they could get into the dining hall. And they always brought up a bunch of southerners—a bunch of rebels—that they'd send up to Hanover, you know, in the middle of the winter to train them. And one of them was heard to say to the other, he said, "It's a good thing we didn't win the war between the states; we'd had to occupy this damn country." [Laughter]

DONIN: He wasn't happy, I guess.

WIEDERHOLD: No, they weren't happy at all.

DONIN: And so none of the dorms were left for the undergrads?

WIEDERHOLD: There were a few that were left, but, I mean, they took over—don't ask me which ones, because I—after we left Smith—we got booted out of there—I spent a little time in Fayerweather, and then I went off campus and lived the rest of the time and went from one place to another.

DONIN: Were these sort of boarding houses that you were in?

WIEDERHOLD: Yes.

DONIN: Was it faculty who were running these or just regular townfolk?

WIEDERHOLD: No. Townfolk rented us rooms, you know, second and third-floor rooms. Not very well heated.

DONIN: I bet. And were you still able to eat in Commons, or was that turned over to the military?

- WIEDERHOLD: There was one—I think Thayer we still had. Yeah, they took over Commons and we had Thayer.
- DONIN: You had Thayer?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yeah. I think that's how it worked. But, in the last of it, I know we ended up eating down at the Inn. You know, the coffee shop at the Inn.
- DONIN: Really?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yeah. And we'd go from hand to mouth.
- DONIN: You got the food wherever you could get it.
- WIEDERHOLD: That's right.
- DONIN: Now, did you have a part-time job while you were there?
- WIEDERHOLD: Yep.
- DONIN: What were you doing?
- WIEDERHOLD: I was reading chemistry papers. I read lab papers for—as a junior, I was reading lab papers for the sophomore premed students.
- DONIN: Oh, interesting.
- WIEDERHOLD: That was a good situation—that was fun, because, you know, they were good students and the chemistry was good. But, they had—some of the grammar was not good. And I had been schooled in grammar when I was a kid and whatnot and, you know, I came off the platform one morning, one day when I was in school, my English teacher came up behind me, put his arm around me, and he says, "You did a fine job, Louie, but you said 'like' for 'as' three times." Well, I'll tell you, I just read everything and when I was reading these papers and I was having these grammatical errors, I asked my boss—Fletcher Low—I said, "Can I knock them down a point for their grammar?" And he said, "You can do whatever you want." And so I used to knock them down—go from a ten to a nine or something like this—and boy did that raise hackles, let me tell you. They all—"this is chemistry classes, not English." And I

said, “Well, you gotta learn the English language to be a physician,” and I walked off. By the end of the semester, they were much better.

DONIN: They were much better.

WIEDERHOLD: Yeah. But that was one of my things. [Laughter]

DONIN: That’s great. That’s a good job. I mean, some of the jobs these undergrads had were pretty gruesome, pretty grim.

WIEDERHOLD: Yeah. Oh, it was fun. No, I enjoyed it, and, you know, of course I was good at it and it was easy, so I was well trained in it, so it was right down my alley, so to speak. But the premed students didn’t like it very well.

DONIN: Not that you were correcting their English. Fair enough.

WIEDERHOLD: I’d red pencil these things and circle all over... Geez. [Laughter]

DONIN: You were not probably one of their favorites.

WIEDERHOLD: I still do it. You know, when you’ve been brought up that way you always—

DONIN: You just can’t help it.

WIEDERHOLD: You can’t help it.

DONIN: That’s great. So, what was your status during those years, in terms of military service?

WIEDERHOLD: Since I was a chemistry major, all of us were deferred because it was, quote, an essential industry, at that time. So, as long as I was an undergraduate, we were all deferred. As soon as we got our diplomas, then we were available, let’s put it this way. So, when I went to University of Illinois, I was only there for—see, I went out in February and my draft number came up in that summer—July or something like that. So, I was drafted in the summer of 1944.

DONIN: So you weren’t able to finish at Illinois at that point.

WIEDERHOLD: No. At that time, I was a conscientious objector, so I was drafted in 4-E to—we were sent to camp to provide useful non-military work. I went to camp in Big Flats, New York, and we worked on a soil conservation service farm. And then through the efforts of my boss in Illinois, Steve Marble, he got me transferred to Columbia University, and there, in a CPS unit, as it was called at the time—and there I worked in an anti-malarial drug lab, synthesizing parts of the anti-malarial drugs at the time and also as a guinea pig. So, I was doing two jobs at that time.

DONIN: You were getting shots of stuff?

WIEDERHOLD: No, what we were doing was taking—quinine was not available because the Japanese had taken over all the South Pacific islands, and so what we were doing was a project that we were taking some drugs which were similar to quinine, and then we were collecting our urine twenty-four hours a day, and they were extracting the human degradation products of these drugs that we were taking to see whether they had any anti-malarial action or not. So, we were kind of machines to generate this. So, I did this for two years while I was there. And while I was there in New York, it was then that some of my—as a matter of fact, my boss had gone out into chemical industry and he had come back, and he was very disenchanted with how he was treated as a graduate chemist, and I thought—and he was off in New Jersey somewhere—and I thought: I can't follow up with this, I've got to get back into medicine and go out in the country. And so, then I decided to shift gears and after I was discharged, I went to medical school.

DONIN: So, you reached your goal that you'd set—

WIEDERHOLD: Backwards, yeah. So, then I—so, I went back to Philadelphia where I came from—as a matter of fact, I was accepted at Penn medical school and I spent six years in Philadelphia in training before I came back to New Hampshire.

DONIN: So, was it—you came back to New Hampshire because of your experience at Dartmouth? I mean, did you want to—

WIEDERHOLD: Well, no, I wanted to do a country practice and I wanted to—I knew the three northern New England states and I kind of

wanted to—I had lived in small towns up here and I thought: Well, I'll look around and see what I can come up with. I answered an ad in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and it was a man in Antrim who was associated with a group in Peterborough who was looking for an associate, so that's how I ended up here.

DONIN: Amazing. And you've been here ever since?

WIEDERHOLD: Been here ever since. [...]

DONIN: So let's go back to your class. The whole class as a whole went through in two and a half years, or whatever.

WIEDERHOLD: No, because in February of 1944, there were only forty civilians of the 700 left on campus. Everybody else had either gone into a military program or had been drafted. And we were—I don't remember whether it was 42 or 44—but it was about 40 who got our degrees in February of '44, and then—

DONIN: You didn't have a ceremony. It was just—

WIEDERHOLD: Oh, no. We just left and they sent us our diplomas. And I headed for Illinois. But then, members of the class graduated or, you know, finished their courses over the next ten years. I don't remember when the last one graduated, but I know it was...

DONIN: What did that do to your sort of sense of class unity, going back to this Hopkins message?

WIEDERHOLD: It just blew it all apart. I mean, it was simple as that. You know, we used to get newsletters—I still do—but, I mean, as far as any camaraderie is concerned, well you know it was... You know, I went back to my twenty-fifth and fiftieth reunions and saw people I hadn't seen for umpteen years, but they have—a bunch of the fellows would get together at football games and whatnot, but that was really all there was to it and I never did that, but that's—I wasn't very active, I guess that's what it amounted to.

DONIN: Well, was your feeling of devotion to your class—it was affected by the fact that you were—

- WIEDERHOLD: Oh, yes, absolutely.
- DONIN: —that you were all dispersed and—
- WIEDERHOLD: Yeah. No, now or the past few years, you know, there are a few people that you have relationships with. Most of them are class—that you have relationships with. I mean, there's one fellow that has been treasurer a long time and he sent a treasurer's report a couple of years ago and I just wrote him back, I said, "This has been a great report," and whatnot. He just wrote me a note and said, "Thanks very much." You know, this sort of stuff. And, you know, he said he's had these kind of problems and whatnot and he's back on his feet and so forth. But, you know, that's really about as far as it goes now.
- DONIN: And it probably would have been different if you guys had had a traditional four-year undergraduate experience.
- WIEDERHOLD: Oh, I'm sure it would have been. Well, just as a sideline to this, the fraternity came in conflict with the national fraternity because of their—I think it was because of not admitting Jews to the fraternity, or blacks or something. But anyway, so they had to disengage themselves from the national, and so now it's just a local fraternity. You know, Bones Gates which I get all these things from, but, I mean, I have no relationship with them whatsoever, you know.
- DONIN: Well, again, they were impacted by the fact that they were shut down during the war and then had a new president of Dartmouth.
- WIEDERHOLD: They weren't shut down, they were very low-key.
- DONIN: And then John Dickey came along after President Hopkins and I think he made it one of his goals to...
- WIEDERHOLD: Well, you know, this has been my biggest gripe about Dartmouth is: Do you realize that the number of administrators to student ratio at Dartmouth is higher than in any other of the Ivy League schools?
- DONIN: Didn't know that.

WIEDERHOLD: That came out in the *New York Times* a couple of years ago. But, you know, Harvard, and Princeton, and Yale, and whatnot—you know, bigger schools—had fewer administrators per student than Dartmouth did.

DONIN: Are you talking about currently, or earlier?

WIEDERHOLD: Well, this started, I think, with knocking down the fraternities, and Dickey, and the subsequent administration that's come through. I mean now, if somebody gets into trouble, and they go to a hearing and there's this committee that hears them and that committee that hears them, and so forth, and they go around, and around, and around. In the old days, you know, you'd go up to the dean's office or one committee; you'd have a hearing; you get told: "You've gotta do this or you've gotta do that or you'll get bumped out for a semester," and that was it.

DONIN: Right. Those were simpler days.

WIEDERHOLD: That's right. Much simpler, plus much more efficient. [...]

DONIN: Did you ever have any—you know, one of the themes is this sort of disconnect between the traditional civilian undergrads and all of these military kids that were training. Was there any sort of interaction between you?

WIEDERHOLD: None.

DONIN: Did you have any of them in your classes?

WIEDERHOLD: No. They had their own classes.

DONIN: Yeah, they did.

WIEDERHOLD: They all had, you know, navy uniforms and whatnot. They had their own classes, their own feeding and stuff, their own exercise.

DONIN: And their own living quarters.

WIEDERHOLD: Their own living quarters. You know, they took over the drill fields and whatnot and so forth.

- DONIN: Yeah. It was really two sort of parallel universes, wasn't it?
- WIEDERHOLD: Exactly. It was like a college within a college, or, you know, a training school within a...
- DONIN: Were they allowed on the sports teams and stuff?
- WIEDERHOLD: No. They were only there for, you know, like three months, 90 days or something like this.
- DONIN: The first—yeah, the 99-day Wonders, as they called them, right?
- WIEDERHOLD: They'd come up and then everybody would go and then they'd bring a new crew in.
- DONIN: Right.

[End of Interview]