

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Ned Jacoby '40
By Mary Donin
January 11, 2011

DONIN: Can you tell us how you ended up coming to Dartmouth?
Were you a legacy or how is it you chose to come here?

JACOBY: I was not a legacy. I went to University School in Shaker Heights and we had something like 51 people in our class. Why 17 of us decided to go to Dartmouth out of that 51, I have no idea. University School was in Shaker Heights and it was dedicated to passing College Boards for the Eastern schools really. But 17 of us came here and a lot of us stuck together a lot which some didn't think was a good idea. I never thought about it; I just made friends outside of the class guys that I'd been with in University School. Although I did room with a couple of them for several years because we knew each other so well that we could all live our own lives without getting mixed up in stuff. It just sort of worked automatically.

DONIN: Had you considered any other school?

JACOBY: I hadn't really. I was crazy about the idea of skiing. And when I look back on why we came to a school like this, I'm just sort of horrified really.

DONIN: Well, if they were guaranteeing that you would get a good education and they were offering skiing, that's not such a bad...

JACOBY: Well, that's about as far as we thought.

DONIN: Right.

JACOBY: Really awful.

DONIN: Did you come visit it before you...

JACOBY: No.

- DONIN: But it turned out all right.
- JACOBY: It did. Yes.
- DONIN: So do you have memories of when you first arrived in Hanover what the school looked like to you? How you felt? Did your parents drive you here or you took a train?
- JACOBY: I took a train.
- DONIN: With your other schoolmates?
- JACOBY: Yes. And Jack Ingersoll and I somehow ended up living in South Fayer on the ground floor to the left as you went in. I went over there to look at it and I discovered it's all security now, so.
- DONIN: Oh dear. [Laughter]
- JACOBY: So I lived in South Fayer the first year.
- DONIN: And do you remember the matriculation ceremony with President Hopkins?
- JACOBY: I have absolutely no memory of it at all. [Laughter]
- DONIN: You're not the only one. There's no reason people would necessarily remember that. It's overwhelming when you're first in a place like this.
- JACOBY: Yes, it is.
- DONIN: I think it took place here, in Webster Hall. I think, but I could be wrong about that. I'm not sure about your particular class. So when you got here and classes started, did you feel you were well-prepared for college?
- JACOBY: I honestly... I don't think I ever thought about it. As I look back on it, I am just absolutely horrified at how little... Well, in the first place, the privilege we had coming here in the height of the Depression, I had no idea. If it hadn't been for my mother, I would never have gone to University School. My dad was a doctor; he had no interest in that at all. Going to University School, I just sort of accepted it. I didn't want to

go at first but once I got there, I really liked it. And I just sort of accepted the whole trip really. Not very deep thinking involved I'm afraid and I just think what a small percentage we were in that era. I mean, gosh, to be able to come here was incredible. I had no idea.

DONIN: Were you the first child in your family to go to college?

JACOBY: I was an only child as my wife points out to me quite a bit.

DONIN: [Laughter] So you weren't following in anybody's footsteps in terms of going away.

JACOBY: I was not following. My dad wanted me to be a doctor and as time went on... I took pre-med which was a good major actually for about anything and I guess it's the same now. I don't know. It was sort of a combination of physics, chemistry, zoology and elective liberal arts stuff. And that was ok. But as school wound down, I was just in agony wondering... I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't want to go on into medicine and maybe I'm getting ahead of myself but what I did do was join the Air Force. We had... A couple of Air Force guys flew up here in a B-18 and they landed on a short strip up in White River somewhere on a real cold day. After they'd done their recruiting, they went out there and discovered it was hot. With airplanes, that's bad. And they discovered they couldn't get off the runway. So what we had to do was we took down two fences so they could go out into a field and give them more run. And they managed to get out of there. But I would guess maybe ten or fifteen of us signed up and the reason I did was that for years in Cleveland, one of my best friend's uncle was head of the air National Guard out at the Cleveland Airport where they had the famous air races and every year we'd go out there every day for the whole time and we were allowed... We could get in the hanger where all the greats were working on their airplanes. And so we hung out with these guys and I just sort of... I guess that was the reason I just gravitated to going in the Air Force and when I came home and said what I'd done, I thought my father was going to kill me. I still remember him leaping out of his chair.

DONIN: Was this after graduation? From Dartmouth?

JACOBY: Yes, it was. It was the last year. And then, so I'd signed up, I went down to Columbus to take the medical exam, physical, and while we were there in Columbus, we actually saw President Roosevelt driving by that day for some reason. And then I came back for the rest of the summer, waited until September and got on a train with a bunch of guys and went down to Love Field in Dallas and that's where I started out. So I was in the Air Force from way before the war was declared – over a year before the war was declared until about half a year after the war ended.

DONIN: And I assume there was a fair number... Since you all graduated in June of 1940, there must have been a fair percentage of your class that was enlisting. Even though war hadn't started for the United States...

JACOBY: Yes, well there were some of the guys who were very politically active and dominant in the class. I'm trying to think of a few. One of them became a... Tom Braden.

DONIN: Yes. He went and joined in England didn't he? With Charles Bolté.

JACOBY: Several of the guys did. That's right.

DONIN: And another fellow named Ellsworth.

JACOBY: Yes, and I've read Bolté's stuff about... I think he wrote a book. I guess Walker Weed gave it to me and I read it just maybe half a year ago. But yes, they were... Boy, I wouldn't have wanted to be in the British infantry, I'll tell you.

DONIN: And they left early. I mean, they didn't graduate? Did they leave before they graduated?

JACOBY: That's a good question. I don't know. There must have been something. Maybe. I really don't know.

DONIN: Did they sort of set the tone on campus for the political dialogue about whether to intervene or not to intervene? Was there a lot of that kind of conversation going on?

JACOBY: I think my remembrance of it was that they were the first evidence of any thought of action at all. And I don't think it

was very popular at first. And our view of the whole thing was pretty much non-action. We came close in a lot of ways to not doing anything. So there was a lot of pros and cons about their... They were always sort of politically active in the class and sort of leaders in that. So it made a big impression on everybody.

DONIN

And I understand from reading *The D* and such that there was this sort of... You know, this ongoing dialogue between the isolationists versus the interventionists and that there were speakers on campus trying to drum up interest, talking about the Nazis. Dorothy Thompson, who I guess was a famous journalist, and others were on campus trying to beat the drum a little bit.

JACOBY:

Yes. Well, one thing was that in the summer of 1938, Dewitt Jones, who was in my class, Charlie Campbell, who was... they roomed together. Charlie was, his dad was a big car dealer mogul in Honolulu, and the three of us finished our exams that June in '38 and we took the train, I guess, down to New York and that night... We took our last exams in the morning and that night we got on the Norddeutsche Lloyd. It was the *Reichland*. We were in third class with all the Germans returning to the home country and we ran into some Harvard guy who knew what to do on ships and he said the first thing we should do... He said, get on your best clothes and he knew all the tricks through the engine room and everything and we ended up in first class. And he said, now, if you walk around up here this first night everybody... All the guys on the ship that work up here, they'll assume you're in first class and you can then... Which proved to be true. You could come up any time you wanted but the first class girls liked to come down to third class because all the Germans were dancing and all that stuff. [Laughter] It was a fabulous trip. But anyway, we spent some time in Nazi Germany and the funny part was that... I've often listened to people sound off about Nazi Germany and they are always so self-righteous that they would know this was bad. Actually the Americans loved Germany in 1938. They hated France and Italy but they loved Germany because the trains ran on time and everything was bright and sparkly and everything was upbeat and it was really... They forget that, how much they liked Germany. Now everybody... Oh that's

assumed, it was terrible and everyone would recognize how terrible it was. But they didn't.

DONIN: So when you came back, did you try to convince people that Germany was not a terrible place to be.

JACOBY: No, not the slightest.

DONIN: Did you consider yourself political in those days?

JACOBY: No. What I was interested in was... Well, it was a fabulous summer. I will never forget it. And the big deal was I was into climbing. And Walter Prager and Otto Furrer were the two great ski gods and he got me an introduction to Otto. So I split off from the other two guys in Paris, took the train to Chamonix and I was down there for three or four days. I didn't climb there. And then I went to Zermatt and I had a bike and I biked out to Otto's house and his wife was there and she set up a deal. Got a place for me to stay in a little kitchen/bedroom with a guy who made ice axes there. Had goats in the kitchen. But I can't... That was the most fabulous summer for me. And I climbed the Matterhorn with Furrer and we had a beautiful day and so that was a big deal.

DONIN: A very big deal. Yes.

JACOBY: And he was killed in 1951 and I just learned about that. I knew he had been killed climbing but I didn't know the details. I just learned about it about a month ago. I saw a beautiful thing online about it, by a Swedish guy who'd made the climb and I sent him an email. We started up a conversation and it turned out he'd done this forty years before and now he'd had his kids over there but he said, you know, Furrer was killed. And it turned out he was killed leading a woman on the Matterhorn and on the Italian side they had a rope ladder called Jacob's ladder and he just accepted it was ok and was halfway down and the thing broke. It had been there for years.

DONIN: Oh...

JACOBY: And it pulled the woman off evidently and somehow, I don't understand what happened, but she broke both her legs and

was there all night but was rescued the next morning and Furrer was killed.

DONIN: Oh gee.

JACOBY: It's ironic you know. He must have climbed it fifty-sixty times a summer.

DONIN: Well, he let his judgment go awry.

JACOBY: He did. Well, the guys that climbed down, I thought, in Europe, were awfully careless. It just drove me crazy climbing with them. I just thought they were dangerous as anything, so... It was just... so odd. So different than it is now.

DONIN: So where did you first learn to climb? Was it here at Dartmouth or was it earlier?

JACOBY: It was here. Yes. And I guess that was the start of the mountaineering club. And Walter Prager liked to... None of us were really serious. I went down with Jack Durrance and George Sheldon I think. I went to the famous 'Gunks, the famous Shawangunks above New York City. Well, this is the Eastern elite climbing place. A really good place to climb and very tricky and I took one look at that and I decided I just wasn't going to mess with it. It was just too scary for me. I mean, we had done a lot of climbing around here on the rocks. But after that, after I came back from Europe, George Sheldon and a guy named Pete Alexander and I, we had heard that nobody, that several European groups who we sort of idolized, the idea of the Europeans as the big climbers, you know. They had tried to climb what is now called the Whitney-Gilman up on Cannon Cliffs; it's the classic climb up there now. So the three of us, Walter Prager, Bob Skinner, a couple of other guys and the three of us went up there one day and they dumped us off and they went over to climb around on the other side of Franconia Notch. So we were all sort of thinking we were hot shot climbers and had a romantic idea of it and terrible equipment. So we climbed it and we thought we'd made a first ascent on it. We must have been the second to climb it because the two guys who made the first ascent, both profs at Princeton and they'd climbed in Europe two or three

summers so they thought it was just good fun. But we thought it was like we climbed the Eiger, you know. But the worst part about it was that we almost got killed on it and that turned me off from climbing forever. I knew a guy who climbed in Yosemite and he came up to Nevada where we were flying gliders and he wanted to learn how to fly gliders so I got to talk to him about the Yosemite climbing. I will always remember one of the things he said: that you never know whether you're really going to be a climber until the first time you almost got killed. And he said if you went through that and you decided to go on with it then you probably would continue. I found it the worst feeling on earth because for a couple of seconds I thought I was dead and I will never forget it.

DONIN: That cured you.

JACOBY: It cured me. I love reading about climbing. I still do. I've got a bunch of climbing books. I just love reading about it but I've got no desire to it. And it's gotten more and more extreme as you know.

DONIN: Yes.

JACOBY: The equipment's better but the chances... Especially in the Himalayas the chances there are you're going to get nailed.

DONIN: So your climbing career started and ended at Dartmouth.

JACOBY: It did.

DONIN: But you took up another sport too. Weren't you active in skiing? Weren't you on the ski team?

JACOBY: I was. Yes. If you could call it being on the ski team.
[Laughter]

DONIN: What do you mean?

JACOBY: Well, I think we talked about this on the phone, but I didn't ski again until 1969 and I told somebody I was on the ski team and immediately I started getting needled about this, you know. Well, what do you mean you were on the ski team? Well, it wasn't until I came back up here that I really

realized... You see, my understanding of it is that if you ski for the school, you're skiing under the aegis of the Dartmouth Outing Club. You aren't under the Dartmouth athletic association. It's a strange deal. And I can see where it can't be really a college sport because you're never skiing here. You know, they're skiing all over the place and nobody covers it really. So the way it worked was if you wanted to enter a race and you belonged to the Dartmouth Outing Club, you entered the race even if you were a terrible skier. Like you could enter a downhill because you had the DOC as your organization. You could barely ski and you could do this. So that's what we did, you know. I worked hard at it the first year and the second year I entered a couple of things. I had a couple of sort of mediocre results so I got a Class A downhill rating which was good in those days but even that didn't mean a lot. But you could say you skied on the Dartmouth Ski Team. But actually the way we considered the Dartmouth Ski Team really, I suppose, was the guys that were picked for the carnivals.

DONIN: Oh, I see. Right.

JACOBY: That's what sort of determined it. At that time, that was one of the only kind of big intercollegiate things and they wanted to put up the best people so I could read off the guys, you know, Durrance, Ted Hunter, Eddie Wells, John Litchfield, the Chiver brothers, Harold Hillman, trying to think of others... But at any rate, those were the guys that were picked for the big races like if it was McGill or if it was the Carnival or whatever.

DONIN: I see.

JACOBY: So I was saying the truth but at the same time it wasn't really the truth. [Laughter]

DONIN: Right. So who was your... Since you explained that even though you joined Phi Gam you were never active there, who was your social group that you spent time with? Was it roommates in your dorm or your friends that were skiers or...

JACOBY: Yes. I didn't spend much time... The Cleveland guys all stayed together and a lot of people, I think I said, sort of thought that was a waste. I mean, why come up here and

not make friends outside of your circle? I sort of went the other extreme. I mean, I roomed with a couple of Cleveland guys because we all knew each other and it was very peaceful and easy. But one of the big things I was involved in was the school radio station. I'd gotten my ham license when I was... 1931 I think. So DeWitt Jones who was in our class and I were the... We sort of took over the school radio station. It was W1ET and we had a penthouse on top of the physics building.

DONIN: Amazing. What was it called? W1ET?

JACOBY: W1ET. Yes. When we got up here, I think I told you this on the phone maybe. Our first year, the school had lost the license so we used our own radio calls portable. You could do that. You just signed after your call, stroke P for portable and that was ok. But we put in to be reinstated. And why they lost the license was a guy named Willy Leonard and another guy who was a big deal in CBS Sports, the two of them had had the station before and they had a phone station that got into all the peoples' radios around Hanover and one night they had a party up there with a couple of nurses and the mike was open and it just evidently created a big deal and it was getting into everyone's radios and they lost their license.

DONIN: For how long?

JACOBY: Well, it was at least a year. It was the year before we came there.

DONIN: I assume they were disciplined by the college somehow.

JACOBY: I don't know what happened. But they both went on to quite remarkable radio broadcasting careers. But we used code, used a key for all our stuff. We had two hundred-foot towers. They were a standard kind of tower that people use for windmills I think. But the two one hundred foot towers sitting on top of the physics building, that's pretty high.

DONIN: When did you broadcast? In the evenings?

JACOBY: Mostly at night, yes. Sometimes in the afternoons. Short-wave long distance stuff is what we were interested in. Even

though we had a crummy antenna, we still... With the height of the antennas, it's a tremendous advantage. We worked all over the world. Talked with people in Siberia, Japan. It was loads of fun.

DONIN: You must have had a lot of listeners, fans who enjoyed listening.

JACOBY: It doesn't work like that. It's talking back and forth with people.

DONIN: Oh, that kind of radio. Sorry. OK. I thought you were...

JACOBY: We weren't broadcasting.

DONIN: Oh, so this was two-way radio.

JACOBY: Two-way radio. You're up there listening in the middle of the night and you hear this quavery signal coming over the pole and it's some guy in Siberia. We used to say, what are those guys doing over there? Well, God knows. I've read a lot about Siberia since. It is quite amazing.

DONIN: You couldn't even understand what they were saying, could you?

JACOBY: Because there are international radio signals, you could exchange basic information. Where you were, signal strength, your name, please send a card, what the address would be, where to send it. Like that.

DONIN: So this was like a hobby of yours then, right?

JACOBY: It was, right. Oh yes, we were crazy about it. Well, the big deal was working countries. To get 100 countries was incredible.

DONIN: Yes. I misunderstood. I thought you were talking about broadcast radio.

JACOBY: I can see why. Well, the guys that were there that got into big trouble the year before were interested more... They had a phone station and they were more interested in the vocal aspects.

DONIN: Right. So were there other, besides obviously your academic activities, were there any other activities that really absorbed you while you were here, other than the skiing and the climbing, as long as it lasted, and the radio stuff?

JACOBY: The skiing, the climbing and radio.

DONIN: Did you do any writing or...

JACOBY: I did have an English class that involved writing. I had thought about that and I can't come up with the name of my instructor.

DONIN: Oh, we can look in the *Aegis*.

JACOBY: I had a little burst of... I liked the writing and I have written a lot since, the last twenty years or so. I've written a lot of aviation stuff and some other things too. I love writing. I hit on something when I... The first story I wrote for that class, I realized that he had gotten quite excited, thinking that maybe he had somebody who had some promise. And then the next time I sort of got over-confident or sloppy or something and sort of killed it and that sort of did it. But the liking to write has stayed with me all this time.

DONIN: Did you have any – and I don't mean you have to name names because we can look it up in the *Aegis* – but were there any other courses you took that really impacted you, or professors for that matter who made an impression on you?

JACOBY: Well, I had Herr Schlossmacher who was my German prof and I never got over... My wife has gotten on me a number of times for this with languages: in the translations, I would start making up my own novel because I didn't know the verbs or the tenses well enough so I'd try to wing it, you know. [Laughter] So I was not very good at languages, at German, but I took it I think a couple of years and that summer we went to Europe, 1938. I was walking down the street in Paris and here came Herr Schlossmacher walking down. And he was walking along and he didn't stop and he said, "Herr Jacoby, you just passed." And he just kept on walking. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's great. Gee, what are the chances of that happening? That's amazing.

JACOBY: But I did get, going over there that summer, I did get interested. Just being around a language is a big thing. I would do ok if... I spent a lot of time in France because my wife was born there and her mother lived there for fifteen years. Every year I'd go to France, I'd get very interested in speaking. I just love to try and I was getting better at it. So if I could have lived in a country, I think I could have done well. But academic language, I couldn't do it.

DONIN: What would you say your favorite subject was when you were here?

JACOBY: Well, my most unfavorable subject, like a lot of people, was organic chemistry.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

JACOBY: It was just... It was brutal for me. I could only pass it simply by rewriting my notes twice and hoping to God that some of it would stick. The biology classes, I enjoyed that. I liked the English classes. I don't think we were very oriented towards classes. I am afraid, looking back, it's sort of shameful. I think we were all... As I look at it now, I think we were just absolute innocents really. We didn't understand what the privilege was of being able to come here. We didn't have any real desire other than the gentleman's C which I think affected about ninety percent of us. That was something you had to do so you could pursue other things and have a good time. I didn't drink much. I wasn't into that.

DONIN: Did you leave campus much, generally?

JACOBY: If you didn't have a car, it really affected your life here. The guys with cars... Well, I never knew anything about even Lebanon or White River. They could have been Lhasa, Tibet as far as we were concerned. Harold Hillman was a good skier and his dad was track coach here, I believe. And his dad let him use their Woody station wagon and Harold, Bob Skinner, Percy Rideout and I would get in that old station wagon every afternoon and head for Suicide Six and ski over there. And Oak Hill sometimes. So a car made a big

difference. George Sheldon, who I guess became a colonel in the Army and had a career, he was the guy who was the leader of the three of us when we climbed the Whitney-Gilman. And George roomed with a guy, Dave Schilling. I just thought Schilling was sort of a jerk playboy. He had a car, he obviously had money and he and his buddies would head for Smith or someplace every... Heavy, a lot of drinking, a lot of partying. Schilling became one of the highest ranked aces in World War Two. I think he had 23 credits in the famous [Fifty-] Sixth fighter group. I never would have thought it. If I'd known that, I probably would have tried to contact him and get... because like everybody, I always wanted to be in fighters and I wasn't. We never had a chance, so.

DONIN: And you were on campus most of the time. What were the other activities that absorbed you?

JACOBY: Going to the Nugget?

DONIN: Oh yes, that was before it burned down.

JACOBY: Yes. What is it now? It is sort of a funny raised structure where the Nugget used to be on that side street. Isn't it right behind the Casque and Gauntlet?

DONIN: Yes. And it's just a blank. It looks like it's a parking area.

JACOBY: You know, the Nugget. I was crazy about photography. It was a big, big interest of mine.

DONIN: Didn't you work for the *Pictorial*?

JACOBY: I didn't. Maybe some of those things were used in the *Pictorial*. But 35mm was just coming in. I think I told you on the phone that I did a lot of the prints when Durrance and Steve Bradley came back from Australia and New Zealand. They developed all their negatives as they went but they didn't print anything. When they came back they just had tons of stuff and so Dick and I were both using the physics lab darkroom. I can remember when we got all the stuff out and we started to print it and almost right away we found the one picture that became sort of an iconic thing for skiing. It's

been used everywhere. I don't know whether you know the one I mean?

DONIN: Do we have it here in the archives? It would be fun to find that.

JACOBY: Well, you should, yes. Dick wrote his big biography that they did maybe five or six years before Dick died. He and his wife were living in Aspen. The last years of Dick's skiing I was going to Aspen every winter and we got to ski together a lot which was a huge thrill for me because when I was in school that was just way out of our league. I mean, we sort of tag along with our mouths open. [Laughter] So to find myself skiing with Dick was really a lot of fun. But the photography really stood me in good stead. At one point, when we had a graphic design studio, I had to choose whether I was going to be a photographer or stay with... Finally decided not to. It was too late in the game to do it. But I always from school, I've always used a camera a lot. It was just sort of natural when people weren't doing it much. Poor Dave Boyle, my roommate one year, his dad was a Hollywood cameraman and he was at one time, Dave Boyle's dad, John, was president of the ASMP, American Society for Motion Picture Cameramen. At that time, it was a closed club. It was just like a union and you didn't shoot for Hollywood pictures unless you belonged to it, so their sons would follow them right up into it. You know, it was like a, what was the old word? A guild or something?

DONIN: Oh a guild. Yes.

JACOBY: Just like a guild. Dave had a Leica G I remember which we all regarded. We all borrowed it. He never got to use it.

DONIN: Speaking of your roommates, I found a wonderful article by Philip Booth about people who lived in his house up on Occom Ridge.

JACOBY: Yes, how did you find that?

DONIN: And you and Stew Anderson were roommates, right?

JACOBY: [Laughter] We were. One semester we lived out there. Mrs. Booth I think just hated the idea of having to take in students. She was very frosty.

DONIN: Oh dear.

JACOBY: Yes. But we lived there... It was a hike out from classes and it just didn't work out so I think we just had one semester there. And Stew smoked a lot too as I recall. But you know, this sort of thing... I think I remember what you've got here. And I have no memories of him at all. And yet he obviously... Whatever foolishness I was doing....

DONIN: He wanted to emulate you in the winter. [Laughter] You made a big impression on him. So did people in your class, did a lot of them have to have part time jobs when they were here?

JACOBY: No. I would say that that was probably a relative rarity. Maybe I'm wrong about that. Oh, when I think how we took all that for granted, in the state the country was in.

DONIN: Yes.

JACOBY: Just shameful.

[End of interview]