

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Richard Mallary '49
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: How is it that you chose to come to Dartmouth? Did you have family that was here ahead of you?

MALLARY: My father was class of '21; my brother was class of 1947. I lived twenty miles north of here, up the river in Fairlee, Vermont. It was convenient.

DONIN: You were following a family tradition, then, obviously.

MALLARY: I guess so. I mean, my father was a loyal alumnus and was happy to have us be interested in Dartmouth. Actually, at that time, of course, we also—among other things—ran a dairy farm in Fairlee, Vermont, and we supplied all of the milk for the dining halls at Dartmouth College.

DONIN: Amazing.

MALLARY: Yes. [Laughter]

DONIN: So, you were drinking Mallary milk.

MALLARY: Drinking Mallary milk, yes.

DONIN: Fantastic. Is that farm still operating?

MALLARY: We still own much of the land, or I do, and it is still operated as a farm. We sold part of the land to someone else and we lease the land now. But it is now being operated. There are, I think, 900 milking cows on the farm now.

DONIN: So the tradition continues with cows. Great. So you said in your email to me that you thought you were one of the youngest to come here. Was that because you finished high school early, or—

MALLARY: I was sixteen when I came here. I had gained a couple of years back in my early elementary grades and I finished high school at sixteen and entered college at sixteen, so I think I may be the youngest in the class.

DONIN: Very young to be going away to college.

MALLARY: My parents thought I would be well advised to take a year at—I attended the local high school in Bradford, Vermont with a class of, I think, thirty-two in my graduating class, and I think I was the only one going off to a four-year college. They felt that my preparation probably was not as good as it might have been, and they encouraged me to go off to prep school for a year.

DONIN: But you—

MALLARY: Well, this was 1945 and the war years and the feeling that we had to do what needed to be done for the war effort and, you know, getting on and doing things and not spending an extra year was appropriate, so I got admitted and came.

DONIN: And you were obviously familiar with coming here. There was none of the newness that so many of the students experienced who had never seen it.

MALLARY: Well, I knew the area and I knew what the campus was like. I mean, I certainly had very little exposure to the kind of academic rigor that I would be exposed to.

DONIN: How did you make out that first year, academically? You did well?

MALLARY: Four-point in my first year, so I think I had—I don't know. I think I was second or third in the class, academically.

DONIN: Wow. So you clearly made the transition easily, at least academically.

MALLARY: Yeah.

DONIN: Now, the '49s came in three rounds. Some came early, I gather, in March, some came in July. Which group did you—

MALLARY: I came in the fall. I came in the fall. Some came early and, of course, then, as you learned—I mean, many of them left and many people came back from the war. So, I don't know how many, but I probably was among the minority of the class that actually entered and went through four years. I was too young to be hit by the draft.

DONIN: Right. So you were one of those rare traditional civilian students going straight through.

MALLARY: Yeah.

DONIN: So, what was it like as such a young man to be here in a class that seems to me was made up with a whole conglomeration of, you know—

MALLARY: Older veterans: people who had come back from the war. So, it was very different. There were relatively few who had the—I mean, of my ilk, I guess, in terms of not having had the either urban high school or prep school experience, or having had the war experience, so I was not very involved socially at all. And because home was twenty miles up the river, I could go back and get a good meal on the weekends.

DONIN: I see. So, you weren't really forced into a lot of the weekend activities.

MALLARY: No, I was not forced. And probably to my detriment. But, it was convenient and, you know, this was still the end of the war and even after VJ Day, I mean, we were still rationing and so forth and so on, so I still felt an obligation. So, you know, during the war years I had been involved in helping on farm activities.

DONIN: They probably could use your help on the weekends, even, when you went home.

MALLARY: Yeah. I mean, it was a fairly sizable enterprise. My mother and I had moved from—My father practiced law in Springfield, Massachusetts, and my mother and I had moved up to the farm in 1942, sort of as our wartime duty, to live on the farm. I mean, the farm was essentially a hobby operation originally, for my parents, but we had dairy cows and the business of providing milk to the college. So, we moved up as our wartime duty, sort of intending that it be temporary. My brother stayed and finished high school in Springfield, and then came to the college. So, I didn't have the kind of social experience and social connections at the college that many had.

DONIN: Were you interested in, you know, joining a fraternity or participating in—

MALLARY: I never did. My brother did, and I think I went around in the years when they were—the time when they were soliciting membership and I think I got one request and declined it, and some of the others I didn't. So, I did not join a fraternity and I was not involved in much in the way of extracurricular activities.

DONIN: What was your major?

MALLARY: I started out as an English major and during my junior year I was in the English honors program and so forth, and I got bored with the English department. It was too much on style and not enough on substance, and I changed my major to philosophy in the senior year.

DONIN: And was your brother here at the time, or did he—

MALLARY: He was here for a while and then he went down to Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy. This was in lieu of the service. And then he was on a merchant ship for a while, and then he came back to finish up here. The last two years I was here—I guess when I was a junior, he came back and he was married and lived down at Sachem Village and then during my senior year, he had graduated. So he was officially class of '47.

DONIN: Finally got his degree in '48, as did so many of them.

MALLARY: Yeah.

DONIN: That must have been funny to have your brother living down at Sachem.

MALLARY: Yeah. I'd go down periodically and have dinner with them down there at Sachem Village.

DONIN: Better meals, probably, than Thayer Dining Hall.

MALLARY: Yeah, although I don't think I ate at Thayer after one year. I tended to eat around town.

DONIN: Now, in addition to your helping out on the family farm, did you have a part-time job here?

MALLARY: No, I did not.

DONIN: It seems that was a trend that a lot of them did.

MALLARY: No.

DONIN: What was your social group that you had here? Did you have roommates that you hung out with?

MALLARY: I had a roommate, an assigned roommate my first year, and we had relatively little in common. Then I think my second year, I lived in a single room in Russell Sage, and then I lived in a house down towards the bridge off campus.

DONIN: Oh, on West Wheelock.

MALLARY: On West Wheelock. It was Mrs. Smalley's house.

DONIN: So, let's see. When you arrived here in the fall of '45, then, President Hopkins was on his way out and President Dickey was on his way in.

MALLARY: Yeah. He was—John Sloan Dickey—I think I was his first entering class.

DONIN: Right. He signed your matriculation card, then, I guess in the fall.

MALLARY: Yes. So, I was here for Great Issues and so forth and so on.

DONIN: And was that a good experience for you, Great Issues?

MALLARY: Yeah, I thought it was a good program. I don't remember all of them, but we had some very, very interesting speakers and so forth. I think it generated a certain interest in public affairs with me.

DONIN: Sure, which I see from reading your bio. It's obviously what you did a lot of.

MALLARY: Yeah.

DONIN: And you think that started here, probably, as many things do in college.

MALLARY: Perhaps, although I mean, I think—I don't know. My parents had been interested in public affairs and public issues and so forth and so on. Although I claim to be the first member of my family to have had elected office in Vermont. My first town meeting I attended in the town of Fairlee, I was elected selectman, so...

DONIN: Fantastic.

MALLARY: Age—I think I was twenty-two at that time.

DONIN: Do you have any memories of President Dickey? Was he around campus a lot? Did you see him much?

MALLARY: No, not much. I mean, I don't remember. I mean, he was sort of a—I think of him as a fairly distant figure. I mean, he was there. I don't recall any personal contact with him at all.

DONIN: Right. Did you interact with your classmates at all? I mean, did you have a sense of, sort of, belonging to the class of '49?

MALLARY: Not really, no. I mean, I knew I was the class of '49, but I don't think I have any of my close personal friends left from the class. I mean, I know some of them from subsequently, but I don't—and it probably was partly because of my living—my proximity to the college and getting home more regularly, and also because of the turnover in the classes. I mean, there appear to be a group of dedicated '49ers who are closer who may have been close there and who are now and so forth. They have monthly meetings over in Norwich and so forth and so on, which I get down to occasionally.

DONIN: It's almost as if you were a commuter student in some ways.

MALLARY: In some ways.

DONIN: In the modern term.

MALLARY: Yeah, that's probably fair. I mean, because I was—I didn't spend many weekends down here because I wasn't involved in some of the activities and some of the activities were curtailed anyway during that period.

DONIN: Sure. Did you participate in any of the sort of traditional things that went on? I mean, whether it was the—you know, do you have memories of having to wear a freshman beanie and—

MALLARY: Yeah, I had one, I think, and I wore it, but I don't recall any significant hazing or any problem from that.

DONIN: How about, you know, Winter Carnival, or Homecoming, or football games?

MALLARY: No. I think I had a date up for one Carnival and for one Green Key, I think, but I don't remember a lot. I mean, yeah, my first year Carnival I thought it would be appropriate. I did have a date and I was—you know, at sixteen I was not particularly sophisticated anyway, but my roommate at that time—my assigned roommate—didn't, and decided that he was going to drown his sorrows by getting himself over intoxicated over that weekend, so I do recall, but I was not a regular participant in either Carnival or Green Key. I didn't have a lot of social connections from my Vermont connection either because the social, intellectual group up there, they were my friends in high school but I wasn't really close to many of them.

DONIN: Well, they probably saw you as going away to Dartmouth...

MALLARY: Well, I think there was a bit of a class or social distinction. I came from the city and I was accepted at the high school but I think I was not considered as one of the group. I was a bit more academically included than some of the rest of them.

DONIN: Plus you were a flatlander in their eyes, weren't you?

MALLARY: I was a flatlander. Yes, I think I was eventually reasonably well accepted but I was brighter than the rest of the group I was working with and I think they respected that. But also there was a social or economic distinction and I think we were considered to be somewhat more affluent than many of the rest of the classmates.

DONIN: And as you said, a lot of them weren't going to college, is that right? They weren't planning on going to college.

MALLARY: They were going to the army or going to work or I think a couple went to two-year programs. Subsequently, some others may have... coming back from the Army may have but I know at the time I graduated I think I was the only one going to a four-year college.

DONIN: So, when you were here at Dartmouth, in your classes, were you mostly surrounded by veterans and older—

MALLARY: Often, often. Yeah. I mean, I would say probably—I mean, always by older, but I would say, you know, 50 percent probably would be—it's a guess—would be veterans or people who had come back.

DONIN: Were they treated differently, the veterans? Did you treat them differently, either because of age or experience?

MALLARY: Well, I think many of them were more serious. I mean, there was less of the horseplay, less of the frivolous activity, probably, at that time. And, you know, I recall visiting in the dorms with some of the veterans and so forth, and they treated the young kids nicely, but it was sort of a gulf between somebody who was sixteen and fresh out of college and somebody who had just come back from Europe.

DONIN: Exactly. What about your relations with your professors? Did you have anyone who sort of really stands out in your mind as someone who influenced you or mentored you in any way?

MALLARY: Yeah. I mean, when I first came here as a freshman—of course, freshman English was required and Jack Hurd was my father's classmate and I remember my first year. Actually, he had me for both semesters. Whether that was his choice or not, I don't know, but first semester, I think the first week, we were given some reading and assigned to do a theme. And I can recall getting back my first paper from him, which was, you know, relatively short, but it was a page covered with red and blue marks indicating the inadequacy of my performance, but he was thoughtful, and helpful, and really made a difference. I mean, I know he probably did more to interest me in English and it probably was he more than anyone else who pushed me to become an English major, and it wasn't until I got disaffected with senior professors that I left the English department.

DONIN: Was there a particular philosophy professor that inspired you to choose that as your major, ultimately?

MALLARY: I had a lot of them. I mean, I'm trying to remember. I mean, there were several interesting courses. My brother, who became an Episcopal priest and who was interested in that, was devoted to Rosenstock-Huessy and I took the two courses with him. I was less of a disciple than my brother. It was interesting, but I mean, I guess I don't sit well at the foot of the master. Francis Gramlich: interesting. I mean, sort of the psychiatry and psychology, and his take on its philosophical implications was interesting. My problem with the philosophy department was that I became a major in my senior year, and so I was doing Aristotle and Kant at the same time, and it was not—but Don Bartlett was another professor that I—I mean, I took a couple of courses with him in biography. And then, of course, one of my favorites, of course—for many people—was Al Foley. I mean, I took Cowboys and Indians at one point. And, of course, Al was—in 1966, after the Vermont legislature was reapportioned, Al Foley was elected to be the representative from the town of Norwich in the Vermont legislature, and I was Speaker, so I was able to appoint him to committee. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's great. Wonderful.

MALLARY: It was a great course for those who wanted to take it seriously. I mean, it was also, I guess, a gut course for those who wanted something easy, but I know after I'd taken it, Al asked me if I wanted to sign up to assist him in correcting papers for later. But, he was—I mean, you probably know all about him and heard about Al Foley.

DONIN: I've heard some stories.

- MALLARY: Stories, yes. He did talk about Vermont humor and so forth, later, lubricated with a couple of cocktails before. [Laughter]
- DONIN: He definitely stands out as a personality here in those days. I didn't realize though that he got into politics.
- MALLARY: Yes, he was in the first reapportionment session and then I think for one year after that. He was in the state legislature.
- DONIN: Not the first Dartmouth academic that's gone into politics and certainly not the last. There have been others, I guess.
- MALLARY: There have been others. [...] Slade Gordon was my classmate. He went to the Senate. Back in my era, there were probably Republicans in Dartmouth. I'm not sure there are any now. [Laughter] [...]
- DONIN: So, do you think the college did a good job of sort of mainstreaming this diverse group of undergraduates that they had to get their arms around in '45 and '46? Such a diverse group which is... These different life experiences... But they all needed to be run through the system here with this new president trying to get the college back up and running. It was a pretty challenging time.
- MALLARY: It probably was. I guess my sense was that you were here and they provided what they provided, and you made it or you didn't make it on your own. I mean, there was no hand-holding, or counseling, or anything of that sort. I mean, I never was disciplined. I never had to go see the dean about anything. Actually, the dean and the dean of admissions were both classmates of my father's, also.
- DONIN: This was Neidlinger.
- MALLARY: Neidlinger and Bob Strong.
- DONIN: Oh, yes. So, they knew who you were, to be sure.
- MALLARY: They probably—I mean, I think Strong may have known that I was coming. How I got admitted, I have no idea. They weren't doing SATs at that time. Probably in '45, I'm sure they were a lot less restrictive, or a lot less selective in terms of their applicants. So, I applied and I don't recall having any guidance on application or applying anywhere else. I mean, I applied here and I got an automatic invitation—because of my academic record in high school—an automatic invitation to the University of Vermont, but I didn't apply anywhere else.

DONIN: I think legacies in those days, certainly were—it wasn't automatic, but I think there was a great deal more weight put on being a legacy than there is today. With both your father and sibling here...

MALLARY: Yeah.

DONIN: But the fact that there was much less hand-holding and everybody had to sort of get along and do their thing.

MALLARY: I don't know whether—had I required it, there probably were counseling programs. I have no idea whether there was guidance or anything else. I mean, when I decided to shift my major, I did go and talk with—I think Mandelbaum was the head of the philosophy department—and talked with him about it, and I think he said they had to sort of decide which of the courses I had already taken would qualify me and so forth and so on, and they gave me credit for a couple of the biography courses and a few others, in order to get enough credits so I could graduate as a philosophy major. I remember having that discussion with him, but other than that I don't know that I ever had any counseling with anybody about what I was going to do, or what courses I was going to take.

DONIN: Much more independence in those days, I think.

MALLARY: Yeah. [...]

DONIN: Now, of course, was there any sort of job counseling? I mean, when you were getting ready to graduate did anybody ask you: What are you going to do next?

MALLARY: No. I mean, I was in the process of applying for admission to law school. I thought I might do that, but I decided then that I didn't want to move back to the city. I mean, my father stayed in the practice in Springfield, hoping that one or the other of his two sons might—you know, good old nepotism—would be fine, but I decided I didn't want to live in the city. I was attracted to Vermont, but I didn't want a country law practice, either, because it was mostly domestic relations and conveyancing, and so forth. His was largely a corporate practice. So I decided—I signed up to take some—I was interested in farming, so I signed up to take a course in genetics down at University of Massachusetts. And the professor who was doing it, for whom I had signed up at U. Mass., had a nervous breakdown that fall. So, I decided not to go there, and so instead I signed up and I went up and I milked test cows at a farm in Alice, Ontario, fifty miles north of Toronto, three times a day. So, I worked for the better part of a year in

Canada. [...] It was a good experience for me to get away and do something on my own. Then I had an opportunity to buy a small farm in Fairlee of my own, south of the village of Fairlee, so I came back in the fall of 1950, and started my own farm.

DONIN: So young. You were barely twenty. You were twenty-one.

MALLARY: I was twenty, and I became twenty-one, and I was working on the farm—I had my own farm in Fairlee at twenty—and became twenty-one in February, and got elected selectman of the town of Fairlee in March. [Laughter]

DONIN: Meteoric rise.

MALLARY: Yeah, so I had my own farm in Fairlee, and then I got a larger farm up in Bradford, which I operated. So, I operated my own operation for five years. I didn't want to go back on the family farm and sort of... I wanted to demonstrate I could do it on my own first, which I did. By that time, I had a herd of about a hundred cows, so I then got married in '55, and became a part of the family partnership, and I became the manager and a part-owner with my parents in the family farm which we did until we sold the herd in 1970. [...]

[End of interview]