

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Harry Morse '44
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: What brought you to Dartmouth back in the fall of 1940?

MORSE: 'Forty, yes.

DONIN: Were you a legacy?

MORSE: No.

DONIN: Or how is it you ended up coming to Dartmouth?

MORSE: Well, first I should say the headmaster—or the principal—at Brockton High School was a Dartmouth alumnus.

DONIN: Ah.

MORSE: So I five of us from Brockton came, were in that freshman class.

DONIN: It's almost like a feeder school.

MORSE: [Laughs] And so that's why. And I applied to Phillips Andover and Dartmouth College. And Phillips accepted me and Dartmouth accepted me. So I had a choice.

DONIN: Were you thinking of doing a PG year? You mean an extra year at Phillips Andover?

MORSE: Well, I didn't feel that I was the strongest student in the world, and I thought an extra year at Andover would prepare me. And my brother had gone to Andover. And so he was then in his early years at Harvard Medical School. And I had no clue what I wanted to do. And he said, "Well, why don't you take premed?" "Well," I said, "Fine. I have no other ideas." So that made the decision easy.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

MORSE: And so I came in '40 and left in '43.

DONIN: So had you seen Dartmouth before you actually matriculated?

MORSE: No.

DONIN: Did you come up to visit it?

MORSE: No.

DONIN: Pretty scary coming to a place without any warning. But I guess that's the way you did it in those days.

MORSE: In those days. Right.

DONIN: You just arrived.

MORSE: Well, my parents brought me up and left me, and first time I'd ever left home.

DONIN: Wow! And they gave you a beanie, right? Did you have to wear a freshman beanie?

MORSE: Yes. Oh, I wore a freshman beanie. And went through all of the different tricks.

DONIN: Yes.

MORSE: And so on.

DONIN: Carrying furniture and all that kind of thing.

MORSE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: For the upperclassmen.

MORSE: Right.

DONIN: Right. So convocation took place in Webster Hall right here in this building.

MORSE: That's right. Yes.

DONIN: In those days, of course, it was filled with seats rather than with bookshelves.

MORSE: And I remember it very well.

DONIN: And it was President Hopkins at that point still.

MORSE: Right.

DONIN: Uh-huh. What was your—Did you have any reaction to President Hopkins? Everybody seems to feel that he was...

MORSE: Well, I think we were all sort of in awe. And Dean Neidlinger was our main contact. And everybody was afraid of him, I think. And I lived in Streeter dorm on the top floor. And my roommate was from South America, from Bogota.

DONIN: Ah.

MORSE: So I didn't speak a word of Spanish, and he didn't speak any English.

DONIN: How was he going to get through school here?

MORSE: Well, he took English. He had a smattering of English because he went to school... I think he went to private school in Bogota. And he came from a, you know, wealthy family. And so we had an unusual relationship. It was great.

DONIN: Did he master his English by the end of the year?

MORSE: Oh, yes.

DONIN: Yes.

MORSE: And of course they delighted in those days teaching him all the profanity and stuff like that.

DONIN: Yes. I can imagine. Well, did you consider yourself sort of an outdoorsy person who was going to embrace all the hiking and that sort of thing that went on here?

MORSE: Right. Yes.

DONIN: So did you join the Outing Club?

MORSE: I think I did. I may not have, but I think I did.

- DONIN: Did you feel that you were well prepared to be a freshman in college that first year?
- MORSE: I wasn't the strongest student in the world, for sure. So I did it on my brother's advice. He was a much better student than I.
- DONIN: But obviously you made it through.
- MORSE: Yes.
- DONIN: And when was it that you came around to choosing a major?
- MORSE: I majored in biology. I guess it was zoology.
- DONIN: Zoology in those days, right.
- MORSE: And I didn't have really much of a clue what I wanted to do. So my brother, my older brother, said, "Why don't you take premed?" So I did.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. Now you had a nice comment about the help that Dr. Syvertsen gave to you when you were feeling uncertain about your choice.
- MORSE: Yes. I went to Dr. Syvertsen a number of times and said, "I really think I'm in over my head, and I think I should give up this major." And he refused to let me.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- MORSE: He said, "No, you stick with it." So when I applied to Dartmouth Medical School—no, I didn't apply to Dartmouth. I can't remember. We had interviews with Dr. Syvertsen. And what we would do and where we would go. And there were a number of us who weren't strong as students, and we chose Temple Medical School in Philadelphia.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- MORSE: And I think there were five of us who went down to Philadelphia.
- DONIN: And at that point you—So you left here in 1943 and went down to Temple, I see. So let's back up a little bit to December 7, 1941,

Pearl Harbor Day. Were you here on campus? Do you have memories of where you were?

MORSE: I think I must have been here. I'm pretty sure I was here. I'm a little unclear how that worked.

DONIN: Well, everything changed after Pearl Harbor Day. The school started running full time year around.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: And they started accelerating the classes to get you guys educated.

MORSE: And I joined the Navy.

DONIN: Right.

MORSE: And the Navy paid my way through.

DONIN: When did you join the Navy, before you came or after Pearl Harbor?

MORSE: No, after Pearl Harbor.

DONIN: Yes. Did they come—

MORSE: I applied to the Marine Corps.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

MORSE: And I failed the physical. They said you're out of shape. Come back in a month. Get in shape and come back and we'll pass you. In the meanwhile, the Navy recruiters came through, so I joined the Navy.

DONIN: They came through campus.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: Yes. So did a lot of your classmates sign up right there and then?

MORSE: Oh, yes, most of us, I think.

DONIN: Yes. And did any of your classmates actually leave campus then? Or did everybody continue with their education as long as possible?

- MORSE: I think most of us stayed on. Of course I was premed, so the draft board deferred me.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you were able to get enough credits by going through the summer of '42—let's see, yes, the summer of '42. Then you left in October of '43, you think?
- MORSE: Yes.
- DONIN: So you were able to go two summers here and store up enough credits to get your degree.
- MORSE: And we marched to class and all of that. And I went to Philadelphia to the naval hospital and worked as a corpsman until I started medical school.
- DONIN: But you weren't part of the V-12 training?
- MORSE: Yes.
- DONIN: Oh, you were part of the V-12.
- MORSE: I was V-12.
- DONIN: So that must have been—I mean your freshman year you were a regular civilian student.
- MORSE: Right.
- DONIN: So things must have changed dramatically.
- MORSE: They did.
- DONIN: Once you signed up for the Navy.
- MORSE: Uh-huh.
- DONIN: You had to wear a uniform and—
- MORSE: Oh, yes. And we were all in the Navy, we were apprentice seamen.
- DONIN: Yes. And didn't they make you go through some fairly rigorous physical training as well?

MORSE: Oh, yes. We marched to class.

DONIN: Calisthenics before breakfast?

MORSE: We had calisthenics early every morning and all of that.

DONIN: Did you get to stay in the same dorm that you were in, or did they—

MORSE: No, no. I had— Let's see, I think I had two other roommates, and we—I moved from Streeter to one of the nearby dorms.

DONIN: Yes. I guess the Navy took over a lot of the dorms.

MORSE: Yes, the Navy took over them.

DONIN: Sort of made them into temporary—

MORSE: And we served watches, you know, and all that.

DONIN: Had to make your bed in the morning and all that kind of thing.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: The times had changed.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: How about—The classwork changed, too, didn't it? I mean weren't you doing some coursework that was sort of oriented towards military service?

MORSE: I think we had some orientation, yes.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

MORSE: And then I was premed, so I got to take all the premed requirements.

DONIN: Yes. But that's when you went to Dr.—When you were struggling with some of those courses is when you talked to Dr. Syvertsen?

MORSE: Yes. I tried to give up premed because I said I can't handle it. And he wouldn't let me. [Laughter]

DONIN: Well, he was probably a wise man. He probably heard that before. Don't you think?

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: So you stuck it out. And I'm sure you're glad you did.

MORSE: Yes. It's been a wonderful career.

DONIN: Did you stay in touch with him afterwards to keep him up to speed on your progress?

MORSE: I'm pretty sure I did because I came back for all of the—of course there wouldn't have been that many reunions. I stayed in touch for I think until he retired.

DONIN: Now, when you left in the fall of '43, was there any kind of graduation ceremony for you?

MORSE: No.

DONIN: How did you get your diploma?

MORSE: They sent it to us after our first year of medical school.

DONIN: Any of the classmates you had here who were premed, did they go with you to Temple University?

MORSE: Well, I think there were five of us from here.

DONIN: Oh yes, you said that. [...] But the training you had at Temple, were they preparing for you to go into the service then?

MORSE: Most of us were V-12, either Army or Navy.

DONIN: So it was still sort of a military training experience you were having.

MORSE: Except we—I guess we were in uniform, as I recall it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: Even down there in medical school.

MORSE: Yes. But we didn't have to march to class and all that.

DONIN: So let's talk about your life at Dartmouth a little more. I mean who was your sort of social group that you had here? Were you interested in—Did you join a fraternity?

MORSE: Yes, yes. Gamma Delt, which is a local fraternity.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And the rush took place, I guess, in your sophomore year.

MORSE: Sophomore year, right.

DONIN: Was that your main social group, your brothers at Gamma Delt?

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And did you ever live at the dormitory?

MORSE: I lived the first—I think it was the first year or maybe it was two years in a dorm. And then I moved into the fraternity.

DONIN: And this was simultaneous to being a member of V-12.

MORSE: Right.

DONIN: They let you live in the fraternity?

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: They probably needed the space.

MORSE: I think, but—

DONIN: Did you have any free time to sort of be a typical civilian once you were in V-12? Probably not.

MORSE: Well, our time was pretty well planned for us. I think I lived in Gile Hall in those days, which was a dormitory there next to Streeter where I started off.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. At that point, there were people from—There were V-12ers coming in from the outside then to also train here. Or had

they not yet arrived? You know they were being assigned here once they'd signed up for the Navy.

MORSE: I think so. But I can't be certain.

DONIN: So most of your friends were actual civilians who'd started out as traditional freshmen back in 1940.

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And so by the time you left here then in the fall of '43, Dartmouth must have been a very different kind of place than the one you found when you got here in 1940.

MORSE: Oh, absolutely. Completely different.

DONIN: There was a commander in charge along with President Hopkins, wasn't there? [...]

MORSE: Right. Yes. My wife was a Quaker.

DONIN: Uh-huh!

MORSE: So we married ourselves down in South Jersey.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

MORSE: There was no minister there.

DONIN: So this was when you were at Temple?

MORSE: I think '47.

DONIN: Let's see, I've got your 50th Reunion book right here. "I was a junior intern, and Mary was a physical therapist in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania." That's great.

MORSE: Everybody in the congregation signed our wedding certificate.

DONIN: Oh, that's wonderful.

MORSE: To make it official.

- DONIN: Sure. That's great. Did you stay sort of close to your class here after you graduated? Did you stay in touch with any of your classmates?
- MORSE: I came to all the reunions. There were a few that were fraternity brothers.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- MORSE: And, you know, every reunion we look each other up.
- DONIN: Sure. Do you think your class was impacted by how sort of fractured your educational experience was by the war? I mean you all left at different times and went off in different directions, and you didn't have sort of a traditional graduation ceremony and all the traditions that you missed out on. Did that impact your sense of belonging to a class, do you think?
- MORSE: Not college. We certainly weren't that close as a medical group because this is where we really... Our class was very cohesive and important.
- DONIN: Your undergraduate, your college class.
- MORSE: Yes. Right. Yes.
- DONIN: So the fact that the war interrupted your college experience didn't affect that sort of unity or sense of belonging.
- MORSE: No, I don't think so.
- DONIN: Despite the fact that you went off in '43 and never really got to graduate, didn't really impact your sense of belonging to the class.
- MORSE: No, I think it may have strengthened it even.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. Everybody tried a little bit harder to keep it going. Yes. And do you have memories of going for that long stretch without any breaks, all through the summers? You know, they started going—
- MORSE: Yes, I took that summer session.
- DONIN: Yes, I bet.

- MORSE: And we had a lot of fun. We went swimming out at Storrs Pond and down in the river in West Lebanon, I think it was.
- DONIN: The V-12ers didn't hold part-time jobs, did they?
- MORSE: Oh, no, no. All expenses were being paid for by the Navy.
- DONIN: Did a lot of your classmates when you were freshmen, did they have to hold part-time jobs? Were a lot of them having to work part-time?
- MORSE: Some of them did, yes.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.
- MORSE: I don't remember what percentage or anything.
- DONIN: Right.
- MORSE: But a sizeable number did have jobs.
- DONIN: Sure. Well, it was right after the Depression.
- MORSE: Yes.
- DONIN: Were you able to watch all the, you know, the football games and basketball games?
- MORSE: Mm-hmm.
- DONIN: That was a popular thing to do among your friends, right?
- MORSE: Oh, yes. Very important.
- DONIN: Did you do any sports yourself? Either intramural or—
- MORSE: No, I didn't—I might have played a little tennis. We had some red-hot football teams in those days.
- DONIN: Wasn't the fall of 1940 when the famous Fifth Down game against—
- MORSE: Yes, I was at it.

DONIN: Were you?

MORSE: Yes, yes. I was there and remember the controversy that broke out. And I think when they finished the game, Cornell had won. So we had a huge celebration that night. The whole student body was out in force, milling around. And of course we were not allowed any drink as freshmen.

DONIN: Oh.

MORSE: You couldn't drink as a freshman.

DONIN: What was the drinking age back then? I don't remember.

MORSE: I think it was 21 maybe. And I had never had anything to drink in high school. That was unheard of.

DONIN: But you celebrated anyway once you heard about the change in the score, right?

MORSE: Yes. We milled about I think all night. [Laughs]

DONIN: Isn't that great!

MORSE: Yes.

DONIN: And that showed real sportsmanship, didn't it, on the part of Cornell?

MORSE: Oh, it did. Yes.

DONIN: Yes, in those days the teams were really, really hot stuff, weren't they?

MORSE: Mm-hmm. Yes.

DONIN: And I guess you had a great basketball team there for a number of years, too.

MORSE: We did, yes. And a number of '44s were leaders in that.

DONIN: On that team, right.

- MORSE: Yes.
- DONIN: So I should think the mood on campus was very much watching and waiting to see what happened. Did you talk a lot about what would happen if the U.S. entered the war?
- MORSE: We did, yes, because we knew we were going to get involved and did get involved.
- DONIN: Were there factions of people who did not want to go to war who were isolationists?
- MORSE: I don't remember anybody who wasn't enthusiastic about it.
- DONIN: Were there any pacifists here?
- MORSE: Not that I know of. I'm sure there must have been.
- DONIN: What did you think of the quality of the teaching here when you were here?
- MORSE: I was very impressed. And I wasn't a strong student. And so I just thought everybody was great, particularly in the sciences. Roy Forster was—I think he taught biology or a phase of it—and I just thought they were great.
- DONIN: Did you have one professor who really inspired you and helped in some way. I suppose it would be Dr. Syvertsen.
- MORSE: Well, you know, I didn't have much contact with him. But as I said, I had two interviews with him when I tried to stop premed and he refused to let me. And I'd go back after about a half hour, back on course. He was a fabulous man.
- DONIN: I think he inspired a lot of medical students, didn't he?
- DONIN: When did you finally decide what was going to be your specialty?
- MORSE: I guess when I was an intern at Temple; I interned there. I got to take Chevalier Jackson's course in bronchoscopy. And Chevalier Jackson was a very famous name. He invented the bronchoscope.
- DONIN: Wow.

- MORSE: And in those days we did all of our work under local anesthesia. We used 10 percent cocaine. And we never put a patient to sleep. And if it was a child, we just wrapped him up and did him without anesthesia.
- DONIN: Oh, my God!
- MORSE: And they were coming in from all over the world to see old Dr. Jackson. And of course by then, his son had taken over.
- DONIN: I see. Yes.
- MORSE: But old Dr. Jackson was 85, and he was completely ambidextrous.
- DONIN: Wow!
- MORSE: And he did all of these chalk drawings of foreign bodies in the lung and in the esophagus. I have given to Dartmouth—it's over on the third or fourth floor of the hospital—some of Dr. Jackson's original chalk drawings, signed by him and dated.
- DONIN: Oh, wonderful!
- MORSE: And some accompanying pictures. That's a very worthwhile collection. [...]
- DONIN: So he wasn't drawing on a blackboard. He was drawing on—
- MORSE: He had a portable blackboard—I mean with paper, black paper.
- DONIN: Oh.
- MORSE: And he would draw on there with both hands. [...] It was a very exciting specialty.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.
- MORSE: And especially when you knew that the master was there. Still teaching. [...]
- MORSE: Two of our sons have gone to Dartmouth. The oldest one was class of '70.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm.

MORSE: And he was career Navy. And he's been stationed all over the world, and we've been every place in the world that he was stationed. And then our baby, the youngest one, was class of '78.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

MORSE: So we followed him around. He spent I guess it was five—three years, four years—in the Air Force. And so we followed him all the places he's been. [Laughs]

DONIN: So you've got the military in your genes and passed it along.

MORSE: Yes.

[End of Interview]