

LÉON DOSTERT

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Léon Dostert was born May 14, 1904, at Longwy, France, the son of Léon Emile Dostert and of Eugenie Marie (Hollet) Dostert.

In 1914, a few months after he had passed his tenth birthday, war broke out between Germany and France, and the town of Longwy, situated as it is near the fortress of Verdun, was overrun by the German armies. It became necessary for everyone attending school in Longwy to study German.

When Léon Dostert had finished elementary school, he had to begin working. He was set, at first, to unloading supplies for the occupying forces. He had acquired the German language so well during his enforced studies, however, that he was assigned to act as interpreter between the German soldiery and his co-workers.

In the course of time the German forces were driven out of Longwy and American forces arrived. Léon Dostert began immediately to study English, and, after some months, spoke sufficiently well to serve the American troops as an interpreter in their dealings with the French.

Eventually the Americans also left Longwy, but a number of them had formed such a high opinion of the abilities of young Léon Dostert that they decided to aid him, if possible, to come to America to further his education.

For a time Léon Dostert's health, which had been almost ruined by the privations of the war years, prevented travel. But it was finally arranged that he come to Pasadena, California, in 1921. He was enrolled in the South Pasadena High School. At first a program involving a number of courses in English was arranged for him, but this soon proved unnecessary. Indeed, he was excused from taking courses in English grammar and composition because his formal English was markedly superior to that of his American classmates.

In 1924, having finished high school, he enrolled at Occidental College and studied there for two years. He then transferred to Georgetown University, where he began working as an Instructor in French, and where, in 1928, he received the degree of Bachelor of Science from the School of Foreign Service. By 1930, he had been granted the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy by Georgetown, and in the following year he was granted the degree of Master of Arts. During this period he continued to teach at Georgetown University and began to move up the academic scale.

He spent the summer of 1929 at La Sorbonne.

In 1932, he began classes with The Johns Hopkins University, and, by 1936, had finished his course work for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. By 1939 he was Professor of French at Georgetown and Chairman of the Department.

In September 1939, France again became involved in a war with Germany, and Léon Dostert, still a French citizen, was called to the colors of the French infantry. He served his tour of duty as an Attaché at the French Embassy in Washington. The fall of France, in July 1940, released him from military duties, but he continued to serve as Attache at the French Embassy until August of 1941, when he became an American citizen.

Returning to academic life, he accepted the position of Professor of French Civilization at Scripps College, remaining there for one year.

In 1942, he enlisted in the American army, was appointed, with the rank of Major, to be a Staff Officer. He served both as Liaison Officer to the French Commander-in-Chief, until 1944, and as interpreter to General Eisenhower, until the end of hostilities.

In 1945, Colonel Dostert was put in charge of organizing the simultaneous interpretation system, the concept of which he was largely instrumental in developing, at the Nuremberg War Crime Trials.

As a result of his military career, Colonel Dostert received from the United States the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, and the European Theater Ribbon with four Combat Area Stars; he received from France the rank of Knight of the Legion of Honor, as well as the Croix de Guerre with two Palms; he was made a Commander Ouissam Alaouite by Morocco and a Commander Nisham Iffikar by Tunisia. In addition to these military honors, he was appointed Officier d'Académie by the French Government.

In 1946, Colonel Dostert was invited to organize the simultaneous interpretation system at the United Nations. The following year he became an Administrative Counselor to the International Telecommunications Union, and, in 1948 he served as Secretary General of the International High Frequency Broadcasting Conference in Mexico City under the auspices of the United Nations.

In 1949, the Reverend Edmund A. Walsh, S. J., Regent of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, and Professor Dostert collaborated in the founding of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics of the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University. This Institute was designed as a school where those who were training for the Foreign Service of the United States might develop a solid background in specific languages, as well as an understanding of the characteristics of language in general. One of the features of the new Institute was the extensive use of tape recorders as a learning aid. (Recordings had been used in language teaching at a number of centers previous to this, especially at Cornell University in the mid-thirties, but it was only with the development of the tape recorder that extensive language laboratories became technically practical.) Professor Dostert was to serve as Director of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics from 1949 until 1959.

During this period he held the post of Professor of French Civilization at Georgetown University and of Chairman of the Department of Foreign Languages in the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University.

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the variety and quality of the activities which developed at the Institute of Languages and Linguistics over the next few years. Many of the more estimable names in contemporary linguistics and language study became associated with the Institute either directly or in the capacity of consultants.

Almost immediately, Professor Dostert organized the Annual Round Table Conference on Languages and Linguistics, which has now become a regular contribution of the Institute to the fields of Linguistics and Language Teaching. At the same time, the Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics was begun; the proceedings of the Round Table Meetings were reported in the Monograph Series, and a number of other contributions to scholarship were published there as well.

In 1952, Professor Dostert organized, in collaboration with the Mutual Security Agency, a program for teaching English in Yugoslavia. This program was designed to give technically competent Yugoslavs a background in English so that they could profit as quickly and as much as possible from their studies in the United States without having to undergo a preliminary period of learning English in the United States.

It was for this project that Professor Dostert developed his binaural apparatus for teaching languages. With the aid of this machine, a student can have available for listening two synchronized texts, one in the language he is studying, at one ear, and the other in a language he knows, at the other ear. The student turns down the volume on the language he knows and listens only to the language he is learning; he endeavors to understand it as he hears it. At any time he is able to raise the volume of the language he understands so that he can immediately discover the content of the more difficult passages in the language he is learning, and without recourse to instructor or dictionary.

In 1953, Professor Dostert was instrumental in organizing a similar English language project in Turkey. This Turkish project, which is still under Professor Dostert's direction, has since developed many facets, and has come to include the training of English Language Teachers in Turkey, and the preparation of textbooks, as well as a literacy program for the Turkish Army.

In 1953, also, Professor Dostert became interested in the problem of machine translation, and was put in charge of the research and organization of an experiment to determine whether translation could actually be effected by machine. This venture, in which Georgetown University collaborated with the International Business Machine Corporation, bore fruit in the first actual mechanical transfer from one language to another in January, 1954.

In 1955, a growing interest in machine translation led to the establishment of the Machine Translation Research Project of Georgetown University with Professor Dostert as its director. This project was originally under the sponsorship of the

National Science Foundation and of the Central Intelligence Agency. It is currently sponsored by the United States Atomic Energy Commission, and by the Research Directorate of EURATOM.

In 1957, Franklin and Marshall College conferred on Professor Dostert the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

In 1958, Georgetown University conferred on Professor Dostert the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*).

In 1959, Professor Dostert was invited to serve as Chairman of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. In 1959 also, he relinquished the Directorship of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics in order to devote his time more fully to Machine Translation. The Machine Translation Research Project had expanded rapidly and developed associations with other machine translation groups, both in the United States and abroad. The details of this development are set forth in the General Report (1952-63), Georgetown University Machine Translation Research Project Paper No. 30, June 1963. In the preface to this paper, Professor Dostert gives an account of the basic thinking behind the developments in the Machine Translation Research Project at Georgetown.

In 1960, Occidental College conferred on Professor Dostert the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

In 1960, Professor Dostert served as President of the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations.

Also in 1960, during a series of discussions as to how the blind could be trained in various types of work, Professor Dostert suggested that they might be trained in various language skills. As a result, a research and development project, under the sponsorship of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, was established to train blind students as transcribers of spoken Russian. Later, the project was extended to include similar training in German, and to try methods by which the blind might be trained as teachers of these languages. This training and research are still being carried on.

During the academic year 1963-64 Professor Dostert was on leave from Georgetown University; he has accepted an invitation to lecture in French at Occidental College, where he began his university career. At present he is chairman of the Modern Language department of that Institution.

Professor Dostert is a member of a number of scholarly associations, including Phi Beta Kappa and the Phi Beta Kappa Associates; he also belongs to the Modern Language Association, to the Linguistic Society of America, to the American Association of Teachers of French, and to the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations.

Professor Dostert has served as the Editor of the Georgetown University French Review (1932-39), as Chairman of the Committee on Publications of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics of Georgetown University since the founding of the Institute, and as Editor of the Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics of

Georgetown University since 1951; in addition to supervising the editing of all of the Monographs, he personally edited the Monograph on Machine Translation (Number 10).

A list of Professor Dostert's publications follows.

PUBLICATIONS BY LÉON DOSTERT

- "Machine Translation and Automatic Language Data Processing" *Vistas In Information Handling*, Volume 1, "The Augmentation of Man's Intellect by Machine" (1963).
- "Approaches to the Reduction of Ambiguity in Machine Translation", *Journal of the Society of Motion Pictures and Television Engineers* (April, 1959).
- François, Premier Cours* (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Co., 1958).
- François, Cours Moyen* (Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Co., 1961).
- Spoken French, Basic Course, Units 1-6, MB 600*. (Nine reprints since 1955). Prepared for the United States Armed Forces Institute (1955), 125 pp., 24 ill.
- "Foreign Language Reading Skill", *Journal of Chemical Education*, Vol. 32 (March 1955).
- "The Georgetown-IBM Experiment", included in collection of essays, *Machine Translation of Languages*, edited by William N. Locke and A. Donald Booth (Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1955).
- "Certain Pedagogical Concepts for the Use of Audio Aids in Language Teaching", *The French Review*, Vol. 27, no. 6 (May 1954).
- "French in the Service of the Church", *La France et la Chrétienté*, Golden Jubilee Symposium, Assumption College (Worcester, Mass., 1954).
- "The Georgetown Institute Language Program", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 63, no. 2 (April 1953).
- "The Language Laboratory", *Report on the Second Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Teaching*, edited by John De Francis, No. 1, of *Monograph Series on Linguistics and Language Studies* (Georgetown University Press, September 1951), pp. 73-29.
- "Languages in Preparedness: Link or Obstacle?", *Astor of The Calvary Journal*, Vol. 60, no. 3 (May 1951).
- "The Wilsonian Ideal and World Reconstruction", *World Affairs Interpreter*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (July 1942).
- France and the War*, No. 24 in the series, *American in a World at War* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1942).
- "Paul Bourget et les Etats-Unis", *Georgetown University French Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (May 1936).

“François Mauriac”, *Georgetown University French Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (December 1935).

“The Catholic Movement in Contemporary French Thought and Literature”,
Georgetown University French Review, Vol. 4, No. 1 (December 1935).

Georgetown University