

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 13, 2006

**Boston in War Time:** I spent from September 1942 until June 1944 in Boston and Providence during World War II. Boston, especially, was a vibrant, busy place with a military presence everywhere. In addition to the large military bases of Camp Edwards and Fort Devons in Massachusetts and the naval installations from Maine to the Connecticut coast, nearly every New England college and university (and there were a lot of them) had a military program. Boston with its theaters and other attractions, was the destination of thousands of military men, and a few women, who might obtain a weekend pass. The basement of the Statler Hotel had a huge barbershop with about 15 barbers and a dozen shoe-shine boys and men, all kept busy by the flood of weekend servicemen. The right arms of officers would be worn out by returning the salutes of the hordes of soldiers and sailors passing them on the sidewalks.

Nearly all visitors to Boston arrived by train. Three railroads served the city: the New York, New Haven & Hartford to the south and southwest; the Boston & Albany, a subsidiary of the New York Central, which ran straight west to Springfield and Albany; and the Boston and Maine to the north toward Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. Ninety-eight percent of the passenger trains were steam-powered. I liked that, but security was tight, and not even servicemen were allowed to walk to the front of the trains to observe the locomotives before departures.

As a civilian freshman at M.I.T. in Cambridge, immediately across the Charles River from Boston, I enlisted in the Army Reserve Corps on December 11, 1942. This was supposedly a chance for eligible draftees to choose and apply for military programs available to college students. I applied for a "Meteorology B" program and was accepted sometime in January '43. The semester ended with mid-year exams at the end of January, and I came home thinking I would be called to active duty very soon. It was not until March 15, 1943, that a telegram arrived, saying, "Report to Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, immediately." The next day I took the train for Providence and 3½ years in the active military.

Soon about 150 other buck privates arrived to begin six months of "pre-meteorology." I was the only one without a uniform. No one realized I had not had basic training, and I didn't tell them, but I knew how to march (from R.O.T.C. at M.I.T.), and I was soon fitted with a uniform. Except for the old dorms that were falling apart at Brown, we were treated very well in Providence. Herbert M. Wriston, the elderly president of the university, lectured to us on history, mostly about World War I, which I found very interesting. Governor Howard McGrath of Rhode Island often attended our drills in the quadrangle on the Brown campus. After classes each day, we marched all over the city singing mostly World War I songs such as "Over There," but including a new one, "Remember Pearl Harbor." Each unit or "flight" even had a softball team, and a few times we took the train to Boston on a Saturday afternoon to attend a ball game at Fenway Park or an open-air concert by the Boston Pops on the Esplanade. Several classmates from the Philadelphia area and I came home on three or four weekends during our Providence spring and summer. The weekend started at 1:00 P.M. Saturday and ended at bedtime Sunday night. We always hoped the trains would be on time, and we made record time by cab and on foot from Grand Central to Penn Station in New York to catch our connecting train.

At the beginning of October, I was transferred to M.I.T. for the eight-month final meteorology program. Although the lure of Boston's movie houses was strong, we had 44 hours per week of classroom time plus our lengthy homework and military lectures. We lived in the dorms at M.I.T., which were modern with parquet floors. Dr. Karl T. Compton, president of M.I.T., who, like James Conant of Harvard, was working for the government for \$1 per year, would pass by almost daily and greet us. On Sundays, a few of us would go to a restaurant in Cambridge or Boston for dinner, where we usually paid 99 cents (Massachusetts had a 5 percent old-age tax on all meals \$1 or more). A third of those who started were "washed out" before the rest of us received our commissions on June 5, 1944, the day before D-Day. I went to New Mexico after that and on to other places.