

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 13, 2017

The Ides of March: In Roman times "Ides" must have meant "middle of," somewhere around the 15th of each month. Most of the Ides were not important, but the Ides of March was a special time of religious celebrations, when the Roman Gods were especially active. The great Roman conqueror Julius Caesar was not a superstitious man so he had no particular fear of the Ides of March. Taking no precautions as he entered the Senate in one of the temples in the Roman Forum, he was stabbed to death by Brutus, who represented a faction opposed to Caesar. The date of this assassination was established as March 15, 44 B.C. on the Roman calendar. The event was embellished by William Shakespeare in his famous play of about 1600 A.D. entitled "Julius Caesar."

When young TV meteorologists forecast a March snowstorm today, they seem amazed that this can happen so late in the winter. However, some of our worst blizzards have occurred in March. Possibly the greatest winter storm ever on the East Coast was the "Blizzard of '88" (1888) on March 12-14. All transportation was shut down for several days, and many citizens were without heat and water. It was talked about for several generations.

The heaviest snowfall in northern Delaware and neighboring Pennsylvania during my lifetime was on March 20, 1958. Thirty inches of heavy wet snow was measured on the scale at Walp's Coal Yard in Avondale. No traffic entered or left Yorklyn that day. Electric and telephone lines were down, and many were without power for a week. I made my way to the travel office in Wilmington on March 21 and I never saw such devastation with wires all over Lancaster Pike. We had 21 people booked on the "Queen of Bermuda" sailing from New York on March 22, and I had no idea how many of them could get to New York (about 18 actually made it). I parked in the middle of West Street in front of our travel agency and found the phones in Wilmington working, so I could talk to the steamship line and explain the situation.

I think it was on March 9, 1962, I took the train to New York to visit the office of Frames' Tours, a British company that was handling the European arrangements for the second AACA tour of Western Europe (the tour took place in October). It was snowing all day, and when I got back to Wilmington about 9 P.M., I put on my chains before attempting the 10-mile trip to Auburn Heights. Lancaster Pike was partially plowed, so to protect the chains I decided to use Old Wilmington Road. That was a serious mistake, as I ended in a drift just west of Loveville Road and couldn't move. I knocked on the door of Norman Gregg, got him out of bed, and borrowed a shovel. That was of little use, so I set up the idle on my '55 Chrysler so the battery would continue to charge, opened a window slightly and kept the heater going, and went to sleep on the back seat. About 7 A.M. a snowplow came through, and I was literally "home free." My mother worried about such things. That storm reaped havoc on the Atlantic beaches. Two or three old homes just north of the Henlopen Hotel in Rehoboth Beach, one of them designed by the architect Stanford White, were washed away, and most of that resort's boardwalk was destroyed.

My maternal grandmother's birthday was on March 15. In 1943, which turned out to be her last birthday, when she was 91, we had celebrated with her a few days before, and were home on actual day. I took my mother and Aunt Bertha Marshall in our '37 Packard Twelve to the Wilmington New Century Club on Delaware Avenue for an evening program. I was always happy for an opportunity to drive the "big car" and really for a chance to drive at all with wartime gasoline rationing. It was a damp evening, and I recall how smoothly and quietly the big car performed. Upon arrival home, it was parked in the garage (carriage house), and my mother and I were retiring for the night about 11 P.M. (my dad was already asleep). We had one phone on my father's desk on the first floor and another in the second floor hall. The phone rang, and either my mother or I answered upstairs. It was the Western Union telegraph office in Wilmington. They read a night letter over the phone: "Thomas C. Marshall Jr., report to Brown University, Providence, R.I. immediately." I took the train to Providence the next day (March 16) to begin my 43 months of active duty in the Army Air Force. The Ides of March.