

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 1, 2009

**General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969):** As June comes in each year, I think automatically of the “Longest Day” (June 6, not June 21), the invasion of Normandy in 1944. Four years ago in the *Weekly News*, I told of my remembrances of it. It is impossible to fully understand the event and its implications without knowing something about Gen. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander who had the full weight of the operation on his shoulders.

Growing up in Abilene, Kansas, and securing an appointment to West Point, he held many junior officer jobs in World War I, was General MacArthur's adjutant, and was an officer in charge of the military portion of the building of the Lincoln Highway in 1919. None of these things made Eisenhower a household word, and most of us had never heard of him until the North Africa campaign at the end of 1942. The Nazis had spread eastward and westward from Tunisia in drives to secure the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar. Landing in eastern Morocco and western Algeria, American forces under Eisenhower pushed the Germans back while the British General Montgomery stopped their eastern advance at El Alamein, about 100 miles west of Cairo. Finally North Africa was in Allied hands, and the long campaigns in Sicily and Italy began. Eisenhower was replaced as head of the American forces by General Mark Clark and others, but his leadership was not overlooked in Washington.

In order to secure full U.S. support for the fight against Hitler, Winston Churchill agreed to have an American as supreme allied commander to plan the demise of Nazi Germany and work out details of an invasion of the European continent. No doubt recommended by General George Marshall and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Eisenhower was appointed by President Roosevelt to establish headquarters in England and assume this awesome position. His office and most of his chosen personnel were in place by the summer of 1943. No one knew where the invasion would take place; some thought through the Balkans, some in the south of France, and still others through Scandinavia or the Low Countries. Younger members of the American population thought it was never going to happen; why were we waiting so long?

The story of the final planning that led up to D-Day has been well documented. But even though it may be written about every year at this time, and this time it's the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary, please stop a minute on June 6 to think about the brave men who turned the tide of history on the English Channel and the Normandy Coast. Eisenhower had the responsibility of it all.

I saw Eisenhower on three occasions. During the winter of 1945-46, he was Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, of which the Air Force was then a part, and was making a ‘round-the-world tour of U.S. facilities. His C-54 was due to set down at Harmon Field on Guam when I was forecasting weather (sort of, as they had too many forecasters and had to give us some sort of job). As he stepped off the plane, waving and flashing his famous smile, I was probably about 25 yards away. He was then driven away in the island commander's squad car that purposely took a “back road” to the commander's residence. My roommate at the time, Tom Axon, was taking a nap in his jeep directly across this back road route, but no disciplinary action seemed to come of it.

In 1952, when Eisenhower was running for the presidency, he spoke in Rodney Square in Wilmington, as was the custom for important politicians of the time. The square was filled with people, and my vantage point was not equal to the one on Guam over six years before. Finally, on November 19, 1963, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Joe Mitchell, Lindsay Greenplate and I attended the ceremonies in the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, where the town's most famous resident, then ex-President, gave the main address. With few in the audience, we were probably within 50 feet of the speakers' stand and the entire proceedings. President Kennedy sent his regrets and three days later he was assassinated in Dallas.