

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 24, 2012

Three Months to Christmas, 1942: In mid-September 1942, I had been put on the train for Boston to enroll as a freshman at M.I.T., and as suggested, I arrived several days before classes started. As were many freshmen, I was courted by two fraternities, one on the Fenway and the other on Beacon Street, both across the Charles River from the M.I.T. campus in Cambridge. I was ill-at-ease, homesick, and completely out of my element. My parents realized I was not finding a place to live, so they arrived by train to get me straightened out. Dick Mullikin of Wilmington and I had been in the same class at Wilmington Friends, but he went to M.I.T. in the fall of 1941, so he was about to start his sophomore year when I arrived there. A room was rented from Mrs. James Bush, a widow, at 329 Commonwealth Avenue (just east of Massachusetts Avenue), in the Back Bay section of Boston, and Dick and I moved in together. Most of the large homes in this area had been built soon after the Back Bay was filled in during the 1880s, nearly doubling the size of the city of Boston. Mrs. Bush owned half of a large double house, and with limited means, she did her best to keep it in good repair.

Even though settled in comfortable surroundings, I was still unhappy and asked my parents if I could have my car. When they consented, I took the train home on a Saturday and returned with my 1940 Packard 110 sedan on Monday, October 12, which was a holiday (no classes). My mother didn't want me to drive alone, so Clifford "Cliffey" Murray accompanied me on the 380-mile trip at the wartime speed of 35 m.p.h. Just after dark as we were nearing our destination, we stopped at Fred Marriott's garage on Galen Street in Watertown for a short visit, and he insisted on filling my gas tank, even though I had not expected that. At 11 P.M., I put Cliffey on the night train for his return to Wilmington. Having the car in Boston was a foolish move, however, as gasoline rationing had started in mid-summer, and whereas an "A" gas coupon was good for 4 gallons at first, this coupon was reduced to 1½ gallons in October. Except for one trip to Amherst and Williamstown with a car full of ex-Mercersburg friends, the Packard was driven only about 1½ miles per day to and from school. Before December 1, I had put it in dead storage at \$8 per month, where it stayed until late January.

The Saturday after Thanksgiving was a sad day in Boston. Holy Cross had beaten heavily favored Boston College 55-12 in their annual football game. That night, about 600 people lost their lives in the Coconut Grove Night Club fire, about 1½ miles from where we were living. Dick Mullikin and I had gone to the movies on Huntington Avenue to see *Mrs. Miniver*, and shortly after we returned, the fire trucks and ambulances started to wail and roar on Commonwealth Avenue. This continued almost until dawn.

Snow and bitter cold settled over Boston in December. The railings were removed from the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge so heavy snow from clearing the streets could be dumped in the Charles River. I signed up in what was called the Enlisted Reserve Corps on December 11. As classes concluded for the Christmas holidays, I planned my train trip home. A couple of days before leaving, the *high* temperature of the day was one degree Fahrenheit. I wrote my parents that I would be leaving Boston at 2 p.m. on a through train that would put me in Wilmington about 9:40. The 4-6-4 streamlined steam passenger locomotives then pulling the fastest trains between Boston and New Haven had to be thawed out at the ends of their three-hour runs, and it was about 4:30 before we got away from Back Bay Station. The steam vapor from the speeding locomotive hung low over the snow far behind the train as we sped toward Providence and stopped briefly at Kingston for the University of Rhode Island trade. Then it was dark, and eventually the steam locomotive gave way to an electric at New Haven.

My parents thought I would be in Wilmington at 9:40 and were there to meet me. The train pulled in about 1:00 A.M. In the interim, they waited in the trackside waiting room of the old Pennsylvania Railroad station (now Amtrak's Joe Biden Station). It was another very cold night. This waiting room had no insulation, wooden bench seats, and large steam radiators that attempted to keep it comfortable. I was glad to be home, and my mother did her best to make the holidays as festive as possible during this wartime Christmas. I returned to Boston right after New Year's and stayed until the mid-year exams concluded in late January 1943.

For Christmas 2012, and the Holiday Season, Ruth and I wish the very best to all of you and your families.