

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 18, 2018

Weekends from Brown University, 1943: I took the train from Wilmington to Providence on March 16, 1943, to begin my 3½ years of active duty in the Army Air Force. During my first weeks at Brown University, along with our Pre-Meteorology courses, we were supposed to learn the army routine, which took most of our spare time. Weekend passes were limited to a few hours either Saturday afternoon or Sunday during the first month. Not only did we march in formation between classes, but even to study hall in the evening for about two hours. Thank goodness, about the middle of April, regulations were relaxed somewhat, and once a month we could get a weekend pass that extended from Saturday at 1:00 P.M. until Sunday midnight. Almost each month, I planned a quick trip home during this time.

There were five other recruits from the Philadelphia area in our weather unit at Brown, and usually at least two of them, Carl Brandt and Wally Sonntag, would go home when I did with a slightly shorter trip. There were four round-trips each day on the Pennsylvania and New Haven Railroads between Boston and Washington, D.C., and all of them stopped at both Providence and Wilmington. In addition, Boston-New York trains filled in to provide hourly service. Usually we could make the 1:00 P.M. train from Providence, which originated at noon in Boston and traveled over the Hell Gate Bridge onto Long Island and under the East River to Penn Station in New York. The trains not designated for the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) and Washington (and two trains per day to Pittsburgh) terminated at Grand Central Station. The New Haven was electrified from New York to New Haven, 71 miles, by a side rail in a wooden box about 18" off the ground. New Haven to Boston was still "steam country," except for about two experimental passenger Diesels. This was the section I liked best, both for the scenery and the motive power on the head end.

On a typical trip home, Carl and Wally would get off at North Philadelphia, and I at Wilmington about 7:40 P.M. My father would meet me, and we would go home for a late dinner prepared by my mother, always worth the trip. I would get up between 8:00 and 9:00 Sunday morning, do some local visiting, have another big dinner in mid-afternoon and take the 4:42 train in Wilmington for the return. If on time, this train would arrive in Providence about 11:00 P.M. with no changes. On one of these fast trips home, Ed O'Brien of St. Louis accompanied me, and I took him to Longwood Gardens. The place was wide open, but no one was around. Victory vegetable gardens occupied the area around the main fountains, and the Conservatory was "on hold" with only the necessary maintenance.

The "Yankee Clipper" was the fastest of the New York-Boston trains (except for the all-First Class "Merchant's Limited") which made the 230-mile run from Boston's South Station to Grand Central in New York in 4 hours and 35 minutes. If we missed the 1 o'clock Washington train at Providence on a Saturday, the "Clipper" came through one hour later. The New Haven had 10 streamlined 4-6-4 Hudsons, built about 1937, as the fastest and newest of its passenger engines, and they were beautiful! The only thing that would make them late was the heavy traffic on the double-tracked railroad, with freight trains often causing delays to the passenger service. If the "Clipper" arrived at Grand Central on time, several of us would grab a cab and hurry to Penn Station to get the 6:00 P.M. "Clocker" to Philadelphia. At 30th Street Station, I would change again to a fast train for Wilmington.

Returning to Providence on a warm late summer evening, the first section of the 4:42 did not stop at Wilmington (which was not unusual). Five minutes behind was a second section that did stop, and I rode this train to Providence. I learned that military traffic was so high (mostly by those on passes like me) that there were six sections of this train by the time it got beyond New York. Despite this, we were only about 30 minutes late when steam was put on the front end at New Haven. An old Pacific-type 4-6-2, of which New Haven had gotten out of mothballs for the wartime volume, was connected to the train, and we pulled out. With no delays and seemingly average speed for that curvy and very scenic part of the New Haven, we stopped at the station in New London. Amtrak has eliminated curves and moved the New London station, but at that time the station was in the middle of a sweeping horseshoe curve with the city on the inside behind the station building, and water

on the outside of the double-tracked and heavily-banked curve. The locomotive was headed one way, and around the curve, the rear of the train was headed the other. Most of us got off the train and stood on the platform for a few minutes on this summer evening. Then it was time to go, we pulled out around a reverse horseshoe to Groton and on toward Providence. The old Pacific did herself well, as we covered the curvy 61 miles in less than an hour with her 12 passenger cars behind. Our Providence arrival was at 11:10, 25 minutes behind schedule, but there were 5 sections of this train ahead of us!

A coach ticket from Wilmington to Providence was \$8.25 one-way, but only \$8.25 round-trip for servicemen. As buck privates, we made \$50 per month (prior to World War II, it had been \$21 per month).