

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 6, 2005

The Longest Day, 6/6/44, and Tom's Remembrances of It: Very frequently, I think about June 6, 1944, that is, *The Longest Day*. During the summer of 1943, those of us in Pre-Meteorology School at Brown University speculated and bet informally on where the Allies would invade Hitler's Fortress Europe. Our guesses included everywhere from Greece to Scandinavia. Early on Monday, June 5, 1944, I, along with about 225 others, were commissioned 2nd lieutenants in Walker Memorial Hall at M.I.T. We had 10 days "delay enroute" before reporting to our new location to forecast weather (in my case, Roswell, New Mexico).

Naturally, getting home a.s.a.p. was of top priority, and I had hoped to take the noon train out of Boston, which arrived in Wilmington about 7:40 pm. However, my uniform, being made by "Chappie" Robertson, a one-armed tailor of Summer Street in Boston, was not ready (enlisted men had their uniforms provided; officers had to buy theirs). It could not be picked up until late afternoon, which meant the 11:00 pm train was the best I could do. I lugged all my other belongings to South Station and checked them into a locker, and then went to the movies to put in time. The night train was due in Wilmington at 6:06 am, and my father was always glad to meet me, regardless of the hour (no doubt telegrams and night letters were the means of communication).

Just before 6:00, with the train right on time, I carried my several heavy duffle bags or whatever they were to the vestibule at the end of the coach, so I could throw them off onto the platform when the train made its brief stop at the P.R.R. station (now the Amtrak Station). The operation was successful, and Dad was there. It was a typical June morning, and there had been very early morning showers. My mother had prepared a sumptuous breakfast, which we began before 7:00. We had the radio on, and the news was coming through that France had been invaded by the Allies. We soon learned it was Normandy, but the early news was speculative and inconclusive.

Having been up all night, I went to bed for a long nap. That afternoon, nothing else was on our minds. How bad was the slaughter? Had a beachhead been secured? Looking back to 1944, it seems to me it was at least 10 days before the Allies broke out at all and made it inland more than 3 or 4 miles. Not until 1996, when Ruth and I toured southern England, did I realize how many British ports sent boats of all kinds to participate in the invasion. Every little cove or port along the English Channel, plus more on the Bristol Channel and even on the south coast of Wales sent help and reinforcements. I recall hearing that a few weeks after D-Day, the port of Cherbourg was handling more traffic than the port of New York. It all began on June 6.