

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 4, 2012

A Week Sealed in Time: The first week of June has always been a special one for me, partly because of D-Day in 1944 (a very sobering time), my parents marriage on June 4 (91 years ago), and the beginning of my favorite month with its long days. Twice I have written about 1944 (on June 6, 2005, under the title "The Longest Day," and on June 1, 2009 when I wrote about General Eisenhower). I hope this will not be too repetitious.

"D" in D-Day stood for "Day." After the momentous events of the Normandy landings by Allied forces, authorities could refer back to the days before as "D minus 3" or whatever. This was easier to understand and was more relevant than giving the actual date, when subtraction was required. It was used much more, however, for the days after the initial landings on June 6. For example "a beachhead was secured on D plus 2" or whatever. By D plus 20 the Port of Cherbourg was handling several times as much traffic as the Port of New York!

My Mercersburg Academy roommate, John Chapman, was in the English Channel on June 6. I wrote about this in the *Weekly News* of October 19, 2009. He told a friend of his that they needed to get near the bow of their LST as "we will be observing history." The details of his experiences are described in the earlier story, but to abbreviate, his boat carried many bodies back to England on that first day and then returned immediately to the French Coast, where the LST was sunk and John was picked up by a British hospital ship after he had been in the water for an hour or more. After a two-month recovery at home, he was sent to the Pacific theater and participated in the Battle of Okinawa. John is now a widower living in Broadalbin, New York.

Closer to home, many of my friends and I knew we were to become second lieutenants in Meteorology at M.I. T., just across the Charles River from Boston, on June 5, 1944. Exams were over, and those left in the program had "made it." On Sunday, the 4th, Bob White of Yeadon, Pennsylvania, and I sat in an open boat house along the river on a beautiful day, where we observed the Boston skyline and speculated about our futures. As early as the summer before, many of us were taking friendly bets as to when and where the fortress of Hitler's Europe would be pierced. Some thought it would come from the Mediterranean, some thought from Scandinavia, and some across the Strait of Dover, where England was only about 20 miles from France. All of us young people thought, in the summer of 1943, that the invasion would come much sooner, and by June 1944, we were wondering whether it would ever occur. John Eisenhower, the General's only living son, was commissioned in the regular army at West Point on that beautiful Sunday.

Monday morning, June 5, on schedule, about 200 of us received our commissions, and I went with my orders to a ration board on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, to obtain enough gasoline coupons to drive from Auburn Heights to my assignment at Roswell, New Mexico. Along with my gear, I took the 11 p.m. train out of South Station for Wilmington, where I arrived on time at 6:06 a.m. on June 6. My father was there to meet me, and we drove to Yorklyn. As we enjoyed my mother's breakfast, a news broadcast on the radio told us of the start of the massive Normandy invasion. The "Longest Day" had begun.