

November 13, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

BOSTON IN WAR TIME: I spent from September, 1942, until June, 1944, in Boston and Providence during World War II. Boston, especially, was a vibrant, busy place with a military presence everywhere. In addition to the large military bases of Camp Edwards and Fort Devons in Massachusetts and the naval installations from Maine to the Connecticut coast, nearly every New England college and university (and there were a lot of them) had a military program. Boston with its theatres and other attractions was the destination of thousands of military men, and a few women, who might obtain a weekend pass. The basement of the Statler Hotel had a huge barbershop with about 15 barbers and a dozen shoe-shine boys and men, all kept busy by the flood of weekend servicemen. The right arms of officers would be worn out by returning the salutes of the hordes of soldiers and sailors passing them on the sidewalks.

Nearly all visitors to Boston arrived by train. Three railroads served the city: the New York, New Haven & Hartford to the south and southwest; the Boston & Albany, a subsidiary of the New York Central, that ran straight west to Springfield and Albany; and the Boston and Maine to the north toward Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. 98% of the passenger trains were steam-powered. I liked that, but security was tight and not even servicemen were allowed to walk to the front of the trains to observe the locomotives before departures.

As a civilian freshman at M.I.T. in Cambridge, immediately across the Charles River from Boston, I enlisted in the Army Reserve Corps on December 11, 1942. This was supposedly a chance for eligible draftees to choose and apply for military programs available to college students. I applied for a "Meteorology B" program and was accepted sometime in January, '43. The semester ended with mid-year exams at the end of January, and I came home, thinking I would be called to active duty very soon. It was not until March 15, 1943, that a telegram arrived, saying "report to Brown University, Providence, R.I., immediately". The next day I took the train for Providence and 3-1/2 years in the active military.

Soon about 150 other buck privates arrived to begin 6 months of "pre-meteorology". I was the only one without a uniform. No one realized I had not had basic training, and I didn't tell them, but I knew how to march (from R.O.T.C. at M.I.T.) and I was soon fitted with a uniform. Except for the old dorms that were falling apart at Brown, we were treated very well in Providence. Herbert M. Wriston, the elderly president of the university, lectured to us on history, mostly about World War I, which I found very interesting. Governor Howard McGrath of Rhode Island often attended our drills in the quadrangle on

the Brown campus. After classes each day we marched all over the city singing mostly World War I songs like "Over There", but including a new one "Remember Pearl Harbor". Each unit or "flight" even had a softball team, and a few times we took the train to Boston on a Saturday afternoon to attend a ball game at Fenway Park or an open-air concert by the Boston Pops on the Esplanade. Several classmates from the Philadelphia area and I came home on 3 or 4 weekends during our Providence spring and summer. The "weekend" started at 1:00 P.M. Saturday, and ended at bedtime Sunday night. We always hoped the trains would be on time, and we made record time by cab and on foot from Grand Central to Penn Station in New York to catch our connecting train.

At the beginning of October, I was transferred to M.I.T. for the 8-month final meteorology program. Although the lure of Boston's movie houses was strong, we had 44 hours per week of classroom time plus our lengthy homework and military lectures. We lived in the dorms at M.I.T. which were modern with parquet floors. Dr. Karl T. Compton, president of M.I.T., who, like James Conant of Harvard, was working for the government for \$1 per year, would pass by almost daily and greet us. On Sundays, a few of us would go to a restaurant in Cambridge or Boston for dinner, where we usually paid 99 cents (Massachusetts had a 5% old-age tax on all meals \$1 or more). 1/3 of those who started were "washed out" before the rest of us received our commissions on June 5, 1944, the day before D-Day. I went to New Mexico after that, and on to other places.

Last week, Walter Higgins, Jerry Lucas, Emil Christofano, and Bill Schwoebel removed the brake shoes from the Model 740, and Bill re-riveted the linings, deciding relining was not necessary at this time. Emil cleaned and painted brake arms and other small parts. Walter and helpers removed the hood for repainting. Jim Personti has the Model 76 on the grease rack and expects a friend of his to weld the weak spot on the boiler's bottom head, where he has cleaned up the area in preparation. Bill Schwoebel and Anne Cleary cut some sections for the A.V.R.R. key chain fobs for sale in our gift shop, and Bill organized a track session on Sunday where he, Brent McDougall and Steve Jensen checked over the track in preparation for our November runs. Rob Robison has finished the layout for the new "Herald" which we hope to have off the press by the end of this week. Our annual appeal is coming along well, with about \$14,000 in hand so far. Please help if you can.

On Tuesday, Bob Reilly and I expect to visit J. Harry Feldman, director of the Greater Wilmington Development and Visitors' Bureau, and we, along with Emil Christofano, hope to interview Bill Enslen of Hockessin, a candidate for treasurer of FAHP, as Emil would like us to find a permanent treasurer. Mike May is due Wednesday afternoon, and there is supposed to be a Development Committee meeting at 3:30. Thursday evening, our quarterly Board of Directors meeting will take

place in the reception room of the Museum at 7:30 P.M. We are hoping to pass the final version of our Collections Policy at this meeting. Work sessions will take place on both Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

We can still use more volunteers for our November 24-25 public event, but we are rapidly filling the needed positions, and we thank those who can help. Please let Rob Robison know if you're available either day, if you have not already signed up. Finally, a black walkie-talkie owned by Emil Christofano has been missing since our October event. If anyone knows where this might be, please return it to Emil. Bill Schwoebel, Emil, and others lend us these important units for special events, and we must ascertain that they are returned promptly. Tom