

A Couple of Dates in June

By Mel Lavine

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I heard the other day from an old friend who happened to catch the beginning of a new crime program. The intro dealt with the assassination of Robert Kennedy by Sirhan-Sirhan when Bobby won the California presidential primary on June 5, 1968.

“Do you remember where you were at the time?” my friend asked. He was at a TV station in Sacramento directing a remote broadcast from the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles when Bobby addressed supporters. Moments later, the 42-year-old Kennedy left through a kitchen hallway where he was fatally wounded by a Palestinian immigrant, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan.

“We were all in shock at what happened,” my friend remembered. He rushed to the phone to call his wife at home. “She had turned off the TV as soon as Kennedy and his entourage began to leave. Moments later, as she headed for bed, she heard our dog, Chips, howling in the kitchen! It was something the dog had never done before or since. Strange but true!”

I had no such mystical experience; but, like most people in the time of a memorable event, I remembered what I was doing. “I was working in New York, working for NBC,” I replied, “was at home, had watched the good primary of his California victory, gone happy to sleep, and maybe about 3 in the morning the phone rang. Donna picked up, said it’s NBC, and they want you to come in. I thought, what could that be about, took the phone and all they said was, you got to come in. I got downtown, still not knowing what I was doing until I reached the control room and then I found out. As maybe you and so many others, I thought Bobby was our last great hope.”

June 6, 1944 was the day of the Normandy Invasion, the beginning of the end of World War II, the famous “D-Day” in history, one of the most widely anticipated events in my lifetime. It had been scheduled for June 5 but delayed 24 hours because of the worst weather in the English Channel in 25 years. A teletype operator for one of the news agencies in London reportedly was practicing for the historic moment — such was the competitive clamor to be first — when the “news” was prematurely flashed ’round the world. Back then, I worked after school as an office boy for the Associated Press in downtown Boston, so still retain such minutiae. When the calendar announces June 6, I remember an older cousin who took part in the invasion before dawn on June 6. Although gravely wounded at Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge at Christmas time, one of the fiercest battles of the war, he went on to live a most useful life as a professor of forestry.

In a larger sense, D-Day, and the decisive Battle of Stalingrad in 1943, sealed the doom of

Hitler and his war machine.

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