

**F**ROM a \$15-a-month job as student instructor in geology at the University of Oklahoma to the executive vice-presidency of the Shell Petroleum Corporation in Tulsa!

That is the splendid achievement of Ralph B. Roark, '18ex, who has always displayed a certain knack for doing jobs better than the other fellow.

Even when waiting tables as a college youngster, Roark was the tops. So the home economics teacher chose the smooth and affable young fellow to serve the banquets for visiting notables.

And fate decreed that their paths should cross again. But in later years Roark was to meet the public officials as a key figure in the petroleum industry—not as a youngster working his way through school.

Of course, things could have been much easier, that is, if Roark had been willing to study medicine. But he had his heart set on geology. So he said "No" to his uncle's offer and prepared to enter the University of Oklahoma. His widowed mother could offer only faith and cheerful encouragement.

Ralph had long turned an admiring eye on his brother, Louis, University graduate in 1912 and then professor of geology at the University of Indiana. It was not surprising, then, to the family that Ralph should insist on geology.

And in the face of difficulties, he showed the same self-will and determination that have led him through from the job of the "roughneck" in the oil field to the "white collar" ranks of the office.

So his big brother's footsteps served as his "vocational guidance" and he headed out for the University of Oklahoma despite the fact that he lived only a couple of blocks from the Texas state institution in Austin.

With his brother Ed, Ralph picked up odd jobs on the campus to patch his monthly budget. They took in laundry, worked in sorority houses, and did yard work. In fact, just any chores their resourcefulness could produce.

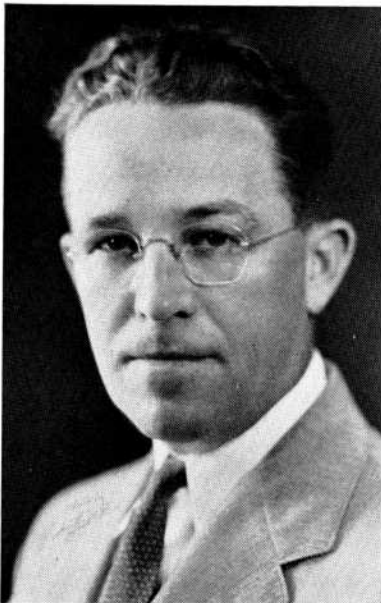
"The professors were very kind to help and encourage me then," Roark recalls. And when the boys had to get up at 5 in the morning they needed a pat on the back.

Roark remembers particularly Dr. Charles Decker, mineralogy instructor; Dr. A. J. Williams, and Dr. Victor Monnett. And the boy's skill and industry was soon to impress the professors. After just a year and one-half in the geology school, he was given the student assistant position.

In 1918 Roark entered the geological department of the Shell Petroleum Corporation, then the Roxana. He made this connection partly through the aid of John Herald and Richard Conklin, former University students, as well as his brother, Louis, who was largely responsible for his original choice of geology.

For a few months in 1918 Roark ob-

# Portrait Of A Sooner



*Ralph B. Roark*

tained a leave of absence to enlist in the army. He was stationed at Camp Hancock, officers training school and machine gun division at Augusta, Georgia, but received his discharge on Christmas, 1918, and returned to Roxana.

While working as a geologist, Roark sensed the thrill and excitement of the production side. Opening up new fields, working, competing to beat other oil companies in getting their wells down!

"Simply fascinating," Roark declares, enthusiastic even after his years of experience. So Roark had himself transferred to the production department in 1920 at Yale, Okla., where he was in charge of engineering work, covering geology, exploitation engineering, exploration, and production engineering.

And what a difference in the scope of the company with its 2,000 barrels daily production nearly two decades ago compared to the far-flung empire today with many times that much production.

"It takes too long for a geologist to see the results of his work," Roark explained in discussing his transfer to the production department. "Maybe you will have to wait ten years before they drill after taking the lease."

But with your hand on the production drill, you can see the wealth from your labors in not so many months. What thrill can compare with the oil man's sensation as the black foam gushes over the top of the derrick!

Roark observes that he wanted to learn this oil business from the "ground up." So he started out as roustabout and roughneck on the rotary drill. No wonder he is so familiar with every phase of the business.

After three years at Yale, Roark was moved to Tonkawa and in 1925 was transferred to Ponca City as chief engineer in charge of Oklahoma and Kansas. Roark must have already felt justified in his decision to choose geology even though it meant working his way through college—his uncle had been willing only to finance his education in medicine.

Another promotion came in June, 1927 when he was made general field superintendent with headquarters in Tulsa. A year later he became production manager, a position which he retained until last fall when he was made executive vice-president of the Mid-Continent area.

In this executive position the voluminous business of six departments passes over his streamlined walnut desk. This encompasses the activities covering geology, land, legal, office manager and treasurer, production, crude purchases and sales in the north central Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, northeast New Mexico, and southeast Colorado.

No wonder Roark is a very, very busy man. Sometimes the visitor must wait days before an appointment goes on the dotted line. But once inside the door, the guest will find Roark as friendly and affable as the day he struck the college campus looking for a job.

As Roark stretches a welcoming hand, the visitor observes a nattily dressed fellow of medium height and weight. Sandy curly hair tops a smiling face and his clear gray eyes reflect a determined light through his rimless glasses. The same power and force is revealed in the firm set of his chin.

Ralph Roark has long been active in technical organizations of the oil industry. He is a member of the A. P. I. advisory committee on Fundamental Research on Occurrence and Recovery of Petroleum, a member of the Research Advisory Committee, Bradford district of the Pennsylvania Oil Producers Association, a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, and a member and director of the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association.

On February 15, 1919, Roark married Bertha Ramsey of Norman whom he met while at the University. The couple has one daughter, Virginia Lee. Besides the technical societies, Roark belongs to the Tulsa Club and the Oakhurst Country Club.

By

**Malvina Stephenson, '36**