

SOONER MAGAZINE

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ROSCOE CATE, '26, Editor-Manager

TED BEAIRD, *Riding the Sooner Range*

HAROLD KEITH, *Sooner Sports Review*

EDITH WALKER, *Assistant Editor*

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The Cover

Kenneth M. Taylor, '40, winner of the Distinguished Service Cross for his outstanding courage in the aerial defense of Pearl Harbor

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The War of Ideas

AMERICA is now actively engaged in World War II, a gigantic struggle in which armed forces are battling in all parts of the globe, in tropical Singapore, in the sand storms of the Libyan desert, on the high seas, and in frozen Russia.

As America goes into combat against the Axis powers, the University of Oklahoma is making a contribution of manpower and military skill and industrial skill through its alumni. Many of our graduates were known to be on duty in army and navy posts in Hawaii and the Philippines when the Japanese made their surprise attacks, and the first casualty lists were scanned with anxiety in Norman.

While America is fighting back against physical invasion, it is also fighting another battle—one that is less spectacular and less dramatic, but one that nevertheless will profoundly influence the future of this nation. This is the battle of ideas—the conflict in ideals that exists between the people of America and the people of the Axis nations.

"The lights of learning of Europe have faded one by one," says Dr. Raymond Fosdick, president of the Rockefeller Foundation. When dictatorship came to Germany, universities were the first to disappear. Next into the discard went freedom of speech, and then freedom of religion. Universities are inherently the enemies of dictators, because they are the fountainhead of democratic ideals.

America must fight the invasion of totalitarian ideas as surely as it must fight the planes and the armies attempting a physical invasion. It is entirely possible that we might win the physical conflict, and still lose our kind of civilization because of the insidious infiltration of totalitarian ideas.

It is the college and university alumni—a comparatively small group of two million in the population of the United States—who must form the first line of defense in the war of ideas, and must see that the college and universities come through the war unscathed to continue their work of handing on to succeeding generations the sacred ideals of democracy.

Should we close our universities, or turn them into military training camps, for the duration? To do so would be a direct step toward the thing which Germany now has—a younger generation that has never known the meaning of free speech and truth and freedom, a Godless younger generation believing that might makes right and that democratic ideals are merely a sign of national weakness.

Our first battle is against the armed might of the Axis powers, but the war will never be really won until America and its democratic allies have proved for all time the validity of the democratic ideal, and the vicious falseness of the totalitarian principle.