

# Riding the Sooner Range

By TED BEAIRD

Editor's Note: *Riding the Range*, formerly a regular feature, has not appeared in *Sooner Magazine* for some time because Major Beaird's time has been fully occupied with his Army duties. For this special issue, however, he air-mailed the following copy from his post in Spokane. It is in the form of a letter to Dr. M. L. Wardell, '19ha, acting director of the extension division.

XMAS MORNING, 1943  
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

Dear M. L.

Indeed, *what* queer turns "fate-in-war" records for all of us! As I recall, one year ago at this exact hour, it's the *early* (very early) hours of Christmas Morning, 1943, I was bedecked with all the trimmin's of the Field Officer of the Day-on duty with thousands of officers and men, in one of the largest Army Air Force installations of the Pacific Northwest-namely, Pendleton Army Air Field, Pendleton, Oregon. Then, as now, clue to a day sacred to all of us-my thoughts, like millions of other American men, turned to HOME and friends, and may I say-then, as now, in retrospect, the "spirit" caused us to rehash, relive the past, and to write.

That Christmas morning, it was my privilege to write many of my friends through you, as you kindly supplied copies of the letters on to them, as requested, after it had reached your desk. Yes, M. L., that was the only means then, (as now) that I could use in replying to the many fine and highly appreciated letters that had gone unanswered-as we "plugged along in the Army." And, what about supplying copies this time? Well, let's do it this way: A promise was made to ROSCOE CATE, '26ba, that double-fisted Executive Manager of Soonerism back home and to his right-hand-bower and "Lady Friday," EDITH WALKER, '416a, that, because of the Armed Forces Service List in the February '44 *Sooner Magazine*, I would (after months of silence) supply RIDING THE SOONER RANGE. So, let's make this an "open letter" to Sooners everywhere, by allowing THE RANGE to go in print.

Twelve months ago, this hour, thousands of fine American soldiers of the U. S. Army were under my immediate charge. It was my good fortune, due to responsibilities entrusted by higher command, to become closely associated with hundreds upon hundreds of those fine officers and men. From every walk of life they come-from every village and city and rural "nook" of these United States, the Army sent them in for training. *Not* training in the art of destruction primarily, BUT, under our command, training in the art of "how to live-and not to die," if possible, in a game where they "play for keeps." The days, weeks and months sped by in double time. Each hour held its tense moments! The crash of a Flying Fortress, *on routine training mission*, on some rugged mountain-side or in the wastes of shifting sands on desert training grounds-taking the lives of nine or ten or eleven, would cause momentary anxiety-and again, force the Command to send out the three-star Western Union Messages to so many homes in America, who then-and possibly not until then-would thoroughly realize WAR (at its worst) was striking at the foundation of "all" American homes!

Thus, M. L., another year has sped by since *that* day-high noon, early August, 1942, when I bade Katheryn and Sallye, the youngster, good-

bye and "winged it," via commercial airline to Miami Beach, Florida, there to begin anew-a learning process, new and strange and quite foreign to one who had been privileged to spend twenty years in the wholesome environment of American youth in the Universities and College Circles of a peaceful America!

Before me, is a "collection" of wires, cables and dozens of V-mail notes that have arrived in the course of the past twelve months, from all sections of the world. Some express hope and cheer-HOPE for the future-cheer in that, that chap (or group of chaps) announces to me, "It was a pleasure to have been associated-and we look forward to the day of PEACE-the day when we again (God willing) may step upon American soil, be HOME, enjoy the freedom of normal citizenship and friends and our families." Other notes in that "stack" picture homesickness, loneliness and utter despair-and when an American boy (and they are all boys in the Army), in the throes of war finds himself in a strange, foreign surrounding and becomes *homesick*-it's the most acute illness known to man! But, you know M. L., and I too, realize that despair will pass-if and when (God willing), they return physically sound and they reach home fire-sides in the future to come.

The (lark and heartbreaking part of that V-mail and message stack is the "three-star files!" Thank God it is small in comparison with the other message forms, but each word, each line, each sentence in the "star-stack" spells tragedy! There they lay before me as recorded history, spelling the end of the trail, the giving of life in this mammoth game of exerting all for the traditional principles of liberty that others may, in future years, continue to live "The American Way. Many, many of those fine Americans, represented in the message stack, before me, were twelve, sixteen or eighteen months ago-rank strangers. Men, who in the normal pursuit of business and professional life, in a small town of Vermont, on the rolling plains of Texas or the inner-most haven of scenic North Carolina, lived the average life of a representative American citizen. Men, who upon reporting to their professional duties daily, displayed the spirit of a democracy by subjecting their families to the traditional teaching of life, liberty, freedom of worship and all that is American.

Young men, from the portals of America's High Schools of Maine, colleges of the deep South or, universities renowned and steeped in tradition, marched quickly and proudly into an organization of millions, plus millions, designated and known as THE ARMED FORCES of these United States! They have found the transition from civilian haunts and activities to the strict discipline and grueling activities of the Armed Forces strange and awesome indeed! But, they have met the "challenge." They have, are now, and will in the immediate future, display a will to restore a permanent peace and re-establish a normal nation.

On this Christmas morning of 1943, none of us are unmindful of the part played by the more than seven thousand sons and daughters of O. U., in this world-wide tragedy. Those thousands fall into the categories of the members of the Armed Forces, reviewed above. Many-far too many of those O. U. lads-have already paid the final price. Others (and may we hope a *limited* few) will likewise fail to return before the final curtain falls on this world-wide tragedy. Others have and others will, return before that final curtain, physically broken (but not in spirit) as living "marks" of men enriched by the experiences to become a part of the reconstruction per-

iod which must of necessity follow the war. All in all, these sons and daughters of O. U. will, following the close of hostilities, stand out as leaders-as true representatives of the American College System.

The contributions in the Armed Forces, of the more than seven thousand men and women of O. U. stands as a memorial to the University's past and its hopes for the future. The contributions of the thousands, plus thousands on the home-front, those giving hourly to the war effort, through work, devotion and loyal effort, adorn the University with a distinction she has never before enjoyed. Is it not significant that wherever they are-in fox-holes of North Africa, New Guinea, or a hill-side of Italy; in B-17's, P-38's or Spitfires of the Air Forces; in operation towers on the line of various training fields; amid death destroyers or rough waves of an unfriendly ocean; or struggling to "keep balance," as they grope through the squalor of India's famine dead, in these and hundreds of other desolate spots, caused by war-they still turn to O. U. and swear allegiance for the training she has offered.

Through my mind flashes a series of events-familiar faces are visualized in strange and abnormal situations brought about by war. These many, many long months now for CAPT. CLIFF HINES, '33, CAPT. J. E. "BUCK" GARRETT, '32, and LT. COL. VIC COLLIER, '34ba, along with many other fine O. U. chaps-as prisoners of war in Japan. How different to those hours when a brief few years ago, we worked together in the interest of O. U.! CAPT. FRANK HAXEL, '32, for more than two years now, living (or existing) along with LT. COL. "BUS" MILES, '27med, and many other Sooners in (or near) ... The Modern Black Hole of Calcutta" (India). COL. LEE B. THOMPSON, '271aw, CAPT. BOYD GUNNING, '37law, and dozens of other Sooner chaps "deep in the deep South Pacific." LT. BOB BILLINGSLEY, '40, LT. COL. HAL MULBROW, '28bus, and many, many fellow Sooners in tanks, planes and jeeps; in G. I. trucks, in G. I. hob-nails and G. I. mud (plus blood) smeared shirts-pulling on through North Africa, Sicily and Italy. Lt (NAVY) HAROLD TACKER, '40fa, LT. ARNOLD COURT, '346a, in the frozen wastes of Attu-and other iceberg sectors of the frigid North-these mere few, M. L., plus thousands of others, we have been privileged to know and with whom we worked and played and appreciated-they represent the SPIRIT OF O. U. Yes, they are the lads and lassies breaking new trails, paying the hard way and opening up new avenues, which-constructed upon the principle of the right to life, liberty and (ultimate) happiness-will some day make RIDING THE SOONER RANGE much easier!

## New Club at Wewoka

Sooners in Wewoka last month organized an O. U. Alumni Club and elected officers as first steps toward applying for a charter.

President of the new group is Raymond Reed, '401aw, Wewoka attorney. Other officers elected are J. R. Frazier, '24ba, '32med, superintendent of schools, vice president; and Mrs. Pliny Frye, '21, secretary-treasurer.

Arrangements for the organization meeting were made by Hicks Epton, '321aw, Wewoka attorney and former president of the O. U. Alumni Association. Speakers at the meeting were Roscoe Cate, '26ba, acting alumni secretary, and Sue Starr, '43ba, alumni field representative.