

# SOONER MAGAZINE

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## From Hell to Helicon: A Prediction

WHEN Johnny comes marching home, the colleges and universities of his nation are going to have a whole series of problems on their hands: conversion from wartime to peacetime schedules, long-postponed repair and building programs, curriculum revision based on experience with large-scale education of great numbers of servicemen in special training schools, reconstitution of faculties depleted by the death of elder members and the war service of younger instructors. Finally, and most important, there will be Johnny himself.

Six or eight months ago nobody could give more than a guess-embroidered answer to such questions as these: How fast and well can the average returning serviceman readjust himself to civilian and student life? What will he be like—restless, cynical, war-haunted? An irresponsible hell-raiser or a serious citizen? Resentful of civilians, scornful of youthful underclassmen? Super-critical of "impractical" college courses, clamorous for education efficiency? Will he be interested in books and ideas, or will there be evidence of a new high-tide of anti-intellectualism such as ensued upon the last war? Will he favor acceleration, or will he want to take time for the more leisurely old-style maturing process? How will he make the transition from the hell of battle to the Helicon of the college campus?

Anything like final answers to these questions must await the period of general demobilization and reconstruction. But in recent months a sufficiently large number of combat veterans has returned to the colleges and universities, so that prediction can now be made on the basis of concrete evidence.

Most educators who have had to do with returned combat veterans would probably agree that there is no overt evidence either of profound cynicism or of dominant idealism. What predominates is a business-like matter-of-factness about getting educated and getting a start in a life which has been interrupted and disrupted, but not corrupted or bankrupt, by the requirements of this war. There is some enthusiasm for the acquisition of knowledge and the discussion of ideas. There is almost no interest in the daily course of the war unless it be for news of what one's old outfit is doing. To men who have seen action, most newspaper stories look so pale and generalized that few veterans find any use for war news as it is being purveyed. This does not mean that the war is not still very much with them, late and soon. Upon all but the most extroverted men combat has had a profound effect. In many quiet dormitory rooms nightmares appear—the flier sweats through a fall down infinite space, the infantryman dreams of being jammed full of shrapnel from an anti-personnel mine—but in the mornings the sun rises, and the combat veterans go about their classroom business like other serious citizens.

Some resentment towards profit-making civilians is evident felt. Pernicious enemy propaganda has not fallen on entirely deaf ears, and there is much ill-informed, emotionally grounded anti-labor prejudice. It has not yet become organized or especially articulate, and there is no rush on the part of returned servicemen to join national organizations for veterans. Anticipating that these things may well happen in the future, many colleges are initiating gripe sessions for servicemen centering on

problems like labor relations or industrial organization in order to suffuse the prejudice problem with the light and air it needs.

Twelve months ago when many universities were making plans for the reception of veterans, there was talk in some quarters of segregating returned servicemen in one area of the campus, and of giving them separate classroom instruction. The theory evidently was that veterans would be clannish anyhow, and that they would not want to sit in class with beardless youths who were at the same academic level with them. The theory, which was immediately questioned by many educational authorities, is not being justified by the facts. Combat veterans naturally tend to drift together but not to isolate themselves from civilian students. The veterans are looked up to and listened to by those not yet old enough to enter the Army.

Also contrary to some previous expectations is the attitude of veterans towards the liberal arts curriculum. It was early feared that this highly technical war might permanently convert many boys in the college age groups to scientific and technological subjects, and divert them from the humanities and social sciences. Again the evidence fails to support the conclusion. It is a safe bet that in the postwar period the proportions of technologists and liberal arts men will return rapidly to normal. The man who was willing to study highly technical subjects in order to help win the war will very likely lose that willingness when the war is won, unless, of course, he was a born technologist to start with. Faculty advisers now know that the courses of study they recommend to veterans must make demonstrable educational sense, and must add up to something pretty tangible in the way of information. As long as that basic rule is followed, the veteran still thinks of his faculty adviser as the educational doctor, and is willing to follow his prescriptions.

The provisions of Public Law 16 (for disabled veterans) and Public Law 346 (the G.I. Bill) are such that most veterans are now accelerating to the extent of attending college the year round. Many ex-servicemen are in the market for quick business and trade school courses, so that they can get started in their life occupations. But most of those who apply for entrance to liberal arts colleges are in no great rush to finish. They are there to get as much as they can, and with a few exceptions they are working hard and seriously. This helps to corroborate what educators have long suspected: that the colleges can do a major job in the postwar period by helping to cushion the impact of great numbers of returning servicemen on the domestic economy.

No informed educator thinks that the task of colleges in the period of demobilization will be short or easy. The dean of a large men's college in New England predicted the other day that "for at least two years after the end of hostilities, we will be enrolling married Air Corps colonels in the freshman class," and that the first "normal" (*i.e.*, veteranless) freshman classes will probably enter American colleges in the fall of 1950. The total picture will be further complicated if compulsory peacetime military training becomes the law of the land. But the

experience with returned veterans now being gained in the colleges will help educators to anticipate the problems of the ex-soldier-student, and to plan intelligently for his mass reception.

Ed's note: These particularly pertinent comments by Carlos Baker, special adviser with the Princeton University Program for Servicemen, on a topic of interest to every institution of higher education in the country are reprinted from *The Saturday Review of Literature* with permission of Norman Cousins, editor.

### The Cover

M. E. Reynolds, linotype operator with the University of Oklahoma Press, at the keyboard of that complicated toy which has turned out Press books of note during the last several years on such varied subjects as literature, farming, western and Indian history and the war.

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