

Riding the Sooner Range

By TED BEAIRD

It's early March 21st—SPRING—1946! The seething mass, "civilian—GI'ing," trek to class rooms and laboratories of the University of Oklahoma is to be seen in all directions. Standing room is at a premium in the lobbies of the Oklahoma Memorial Union. Food lines and coffee lines (not unlike the famed cigarette and nylon lines) are forming in all directions as these returning GI's make a last minute dash to O. U.'s halls of knowledge. That's Spring, 1946 on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. That's the Range these SOONER sons are riding at this spring hour!

Significant that as of this morning there appears a "spring story" in one of the metropolitan papers of the state. A significant story in that it records a five-year span in units of five March 21st's. In the lives of thousands of O. U. men who are as of this hour enjoying "beautiful, wonderful American, Oklahoma spring!" on the campus of the University of Oklahoma, this release is most significant. The story? Well, it's the story of the veterans' five-year hunt for SPRING. Here it is and it is believed that you will like the recording of what sons of O. U. have experienced and "dreamed of" since that Spring—March 21, 1941.

"MARCH 21, 1941—I sure miss the breaking through of spring in good ol' western Oklahoma. As I look out the barracks window, all I can see is snow and more snow, for winter is hard upon the land. You see, I got drafted two months ago, and now I'm going through basic deep in the heart of frosty Colorado.

"MARCH 21, 1942—The calendar says it's spring again, but you can't prove it by me. I've got a wonderful view of everything, but no matter where I look, I can't find a single blade of grass, a solitary tree, or a burst of vernal warmth. There's a furious gale blowing, and this "tin can" we're on is bouncing up and down in choppy Pacific waters. Scuttlebutt says we're headed for Australia, where it's autumn instead of spring right now. It sure is a complicated world.

"MARCH 21, 1943—March 21, and I defy any Oklahoma weatherman to tell whether or not spring is here out in this God-forsaken hole. I'm lying in a fox-hole four feet deep in the mud, and there isn't a thing growing around here but mud and more mud. We're bivouacked on the Mombare River, the dirtiest stream of water in New Guinea, and for my money the dirtiest in the world. Out here, it's all just one season—the muddy season.

"MARCH 21, 1944—That day is here again, but I'm still hunting for one tiny blade of grass. This island is so rocky we had to blast out an area for a few tin huts. There's just one thing around here in great abundance—rocks! The name of this granite paradise is Ailinglapalop; it's in the Marshalls and it's 8,000 miles from a warm, Oklahoma spring.

"MARCH 21, 1945—I've hit the jackpot now! In '41 the ground was covered with snow; in '42 there was no ground, just water; in '43 there was just mud; in '44 rock and more rock, and now the first day of spring again and what've we got? Volcanic ash. This island is called Iwo Jima. We captured it four days ago, and to the first guy who can grow any plant life out here, I'll give a beautiful present: a box of volcanic ash.

"MARCH 21, 1946—Pinch me! I still can't believe it! I woke up this morning to the chirping of birds, and I looked out upon fields of green grass caressed by a warm, sunshiny breeze. I've waited one thousand, eight hundred and twenty-five days for this, but it's been worth it. Ah! Sweet land of liberty. Ah! Beautiful, wonderful American, Oklahoma spring!"

Yes, that vet (and many hundreds of others

like him) is back on the Sooner Range. They are back on the Range as civilians completing their education in O. U.'s halls of learning. BUT—lest we forget—there are other Sooner sons who are not in that line of march to class-rooms and laboratories on O. U.'s campus this "break of spring" morning!

While looking from the office window, watching this stream of young America pass by,—the morning mail is delivered. The note taken from this envelope says:

"To—The Rider of the Sooner Range

"Early this spring morning (March 21, 1946) I have finished a story. It's a series of 'findings' on those who will not be back! It's the 'behind-the-scenes' work devoted to the honored sons of O. U. and establishing living monuments to their memory!"

Signed:
MARY EVELYN SMITH
Senior, O. U.

The "story" by Mary Evelyn speaks for itself. Here it is:

"Two memorials displayed in the Oklahoma Memorial Union on the campus of the University of Oklahoma serve as a constant reminder to students and visitors that the world must keep the peace *this* time. The first is a plaque on the walls of the entrance to the downstairs lobby—honoring those former students and alumni who served in World War I.

"The second, holding more significance for this generation, is the roll of honor in the upstairs lobby—a list of former students and alumni who are listed as dead or missing in World War II.

"The 496 names listed there are a result of thousands of hours' work by the alumni office staff at the University. This staff had no source from which material could be gathered other than the many letters sent to alumni and friends of the University who might know of some Sooner casualty.

"Constant watch of newspapers and requests for aid in the *Sooner Magazine* have filled the alumni files with valuable information concerning these Sooners in the service.

"These files tell the story—the simple, tragic tale of boys who left college to wage war. Full as they are of information, they are not yet complete. Friends and relatives are still contributing facts and details. Some of the Sooners on the plaque are still listed "missing in action." Small imprints show where some missing have been found and names have been removed.

"Anxious to complete the files on World War II as soon as possible, the staff has compiled a compact booklet which shows a brief record of men whose names are on the plaque. These records supplemented by the information from files are pages from life.

"In the file of CAPT. HAROLD L. EARHART, Oklahoma City, who was graduated in 1939 from the College of Engineering, letters tell the story. The first group of letters are from Captain Earhart, written to the alumni office while he was in the United States with the Army Air Corps. The letters echo the sentiment of all those who read *Sooner Magazine* for news of former classmates and professors.

"With them is this letter from his sister, ANN, who wrote the following on March 16, 1944:

'Gentleman:

'My brother, LT. H. L. EARHART, an alumni of the University of Oklahoma, has requested me to forward you his present address in order that you may forward the school monthly alumni magazine to him.

'Please do so as he is rather lonesome where he is stationed.'

"The final chapter of the story was written July 5, 1945, by MISS EARHART:

"This is to advise you for publication that CAPT. H. L. EARHART ('39p.eng.), Eighth Air Force, England, was killed on June 12, 1945, in a crash in Scotland. CAPTAIN EARHART had been overseas nineteen months.

'Please discontinue alumni magazine.'

"This is only one of the many stories told in the files. The folders of O.U.'s war great—such as COL. C. C. KEGELMAN, El Reno; LT. GUS KITCHENS, Sasakwa; CAPT. W. R. (Waddy) YOUNG, Ponca City—bulge with correspondence and newspaper clippings.

"Yet, not overshadowed, are those who died on every battlefield of the war—ENS. THOMAS C. REYNOLDS, '37, killed near Pearl Harbor; LT. RALPH HOWARD, '37-'40, killed during the defense of Bataan; PFC. W. H. (Hal) HOOVER, '44, killed in action in South France; AUGUSTUS S. KERR, '33-'34, chief pharmacist's mate, U. S. Coast Guard, lost in the North Atlantic; LT. JAMES J. EVANS, killed in Belgium; PFC. BILLY BUNCH, '41-'43, killed in North Italy; LT. SCOTT R. BLANTON, '35-'40, killed on New Guinea; DUANE J. CLAPHAM, '38bus, killed in India; LT. WILLIAM J. BAKER, '42-'43, killed on Iwo Jima.

"The complete roster is too long to list here. Fortunately, some of the stories ended happily. Such was the case of LT. HARRY CULVER, '40-'43, who was listed as missing in action March 18. Later he was reported interned for the duration in Sweden. He is now at the University finishing his education under the GI Bill of Rights.

"There may be names omitted from the Union memorial. The alumni office is anxious to have the plaque as complete as possible.

"The war is not merely a memory to friends and relatives of those listed on the Roll of Honor. May there be no necessity for a third such memorial in the Union building!"

Sooner Magazine Receives A. A. C. Comment

Announcements have just been made of the awards of the *American Alumni Council* in the annual magazine competition sponsored by the Council for more than 170 alumni magazines published by Alumni Associations throughout the United States and Canada.

Ohio State University Monthly received the Sibley Award for the magazine of the year based on the eight major points considered in the rating. Professors Thomas F. Barnhart and Mitchell V. Charnley, of the School of Journalism, University of Minnesota, along with A. Phillip Breedon, Editorial Staff Writer, *Minneapolis Daily Times* were the judges for the 1945 magazine awards.

Sooner Magazine, *Penn State Alumni News* and *Colby Alumnus* shared equal honors in the award for editorial pages. The honorable mentions for this award states: "This classification was set up to include informal discussion pages and columns which serve an editorial purpose as well as formal editorial pages. Comparatively few alumni magazines have formal editorial pages which are designated as such. The trend in recent years has been toward the development of personal columns in which the editors comment upon college and alumni affairs. Alumni editors are becoming more conscious of the fact that editorial pages in their magazines, whether conservatively formal or personally informal, must be dressed up to compete successfully with the other pages of the magazine in reader appeal."

Sooner Magazine also received honorable mention in the Higher Education Division. In this designation the judges commented as follows:

"From the large number of entries in this division, it is apparent that alumni magazines in general are giving more attention and more space to the thoughtful interpretation of the problems and objectives of higher education."