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, deprofessional training schools, reconstitution of faculties depleted by the death of elder members and the war service of younger ones. Finally, and most important, there will be Johnny himself.

Six or eight months ago nobody could give more than a guess-embedded answer to such questions as: What will be the average returning serviceman readjust himself to civilian and student life? What will he be like—restless, cynical, war-haunted? An irresponsible hill-raiser or a serious citizen? Resentful of civilians, scornful of professors? 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 be self-centered, or will he want to take time for the more leisurely old-style maturer 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 reconversion. 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, self-centered quality about getting educated and getting a start in a life which has been interrupted and disrupted, but not corrupted or bankrupted, by the requirements of 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 sad and in the average returning serviceman readjusting service is made of young men 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 well 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 group 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 proportion of technologists and liberal arts men will return rapidly to normal. The man who was willing to study highly technical subjects will want 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 nowadays 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 the time for the 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 246 (the G.I. Bill) are such that most veterans are now accelerating to the extent of attending college the year round. Many ex-servicemen in the market for quick business and trade school courses, some of which 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 the colleges, we believe, will be enrolling married Air Corps colonels in the freshman class,” and that the first “normal” (i.e., veteranless) freshman class 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 America 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.

Contents

Riding the Sooner Range . . . 2
By Ted Beaird

The University . . . . . . . . 3

Faculty . . . . . . . . . 6

With the Armed Forces . . . . 7
By Elaine Larecy

Analysis of G.I. Bill (Part 3) . . 13

Association Progress . . . . . 14

Oklahoma Books . . . . . . 15

Calling the Roll . . . . . . . 16
By Elizabeth Lees

Sooner Sports . . . . . . . . 17
By Harold Keith

University of Oklahoma Association

Officers: T. R. Benedum, Norman, president; George D. Hawn, Ardmore, first vice president; E. H. Fawkes, Oklahoma City, second vice president; Ted M. Beaird, Norman, executive secretary; Executive Board Members: Vernon Cook, Oklahoma City; Earl S. Porter, Tulsa; William F. Abshier, Bartlesville; C. V. Nichols, Anadarko; Harry D. Simmons, Stillwater; T. R. Benedum, Norman, all members-at-large; D. E. (Bill) Hodges, Bartlesville, District I representative; James L. Robinson, Tahlequah, District II; Joe A. Brown, Hartshorne, District III; James Fraser, Wewoka, District IV; Fred E. Tamman, Norman, District V; Dr. Roy C. Warren, Yukon, District VI; Mrs. June Baker Durlee, Mangum, District VII; Mai, William V. Epp, Ponca City, District VIII; Marie Woods, El Reno, District IX.

Trustees of Life Membership Funds: Errett R. Knowles, Oklahoma City; F. Carey, Oklahoma City; Neil R. Johnson, Norman.

Sooner Magazine is published the fifth day of each month by the University of Oklahoma Association, Union Building, Norman, Oklahoma. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 13, 1928, at the post office at Norman, Oklahoma, under Act of Congress, March 3, 1879. Subscription $3.00 per year, of which $2.00 is for the Magazine and $1.00 for Alumni Dues.

Foreign, $4.00 Life, $6.00. Single copies 25 cents.

Opinions expressed are those of the editor and do not necessarily represent official action of the Alumni Executive Board. Member of American Alumni Council.