Riding the Sooner Range

By Ted Beard

It's early March 21st—SPRING—1946! The seething mass, "civilian—G'Ing," trek to class rooms and laboratories of the University of Oklahoma to be seen in all directions. Standing room in all is the annual procession in the offices 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 their way to the University of the Oklahomas 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 "Landscape" in the dormitories of the state. A significant story that it records a five-year span in units of five March 21sts. In the lives of thousands of O. U. men who are as of this moment "Enjoying" the best of Oklahoma, wonderful America, 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.

"Beans and bare feet" is the prevailing thought of the Sooner Range. We miss the breaking through of spring in good old 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've 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 master 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 gate blowing, and this "tin can" we're on is big enough to grow down in choppy Pacific waters.

"MARCH 21, 1943—Here our weary hearts miss the breaking through of spring in good old 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've got drafted two months ago, and now I'm going through basic deep in the heart of frosty Colorado.

"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—rock! The name of this granite paradise is Allinghamapalooza; 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 with what we've got! Rock! Volcanic ash. This island is called Iwo Jima. We captured it four days ago, and the first guy who can grow any plantlife out here, I'll give him as much recognition as O. U. itself.

"MARCH 21, 1946—Pineapple, 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 covered by a warm, sunny 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 America, Oklahoma spring!

Yes, that vet (and many hundreds of others like him) is back on the Sooner Range. They are on the Range as of this morning completing their education in O. U. 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:

The 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 of Sooner men, 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 are those of information, 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 Sooner sons 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.

"The Sooner Magazine has requested information from files. The folders of O. U.'s war great—such as "class of 1939"—have been supplemented by the information from files in the University files. The alumni office has been anxious to have the names of these students on the plaque as complete as possible.

"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 the boys who left college to wage war. Full as they are of information, they are not yet complete.

"It is apparent that you will like the recording of what sons of O. U. have experienced and "dreamed of" since that Spring—March 21, 1941.

"The complete roster is too long to list here. Fortunately, some names are coming through happily. Such as 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.